PARENT-CHILD SEPARATION IN MEXICAN TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES

by

JOANNA DREBY

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Julia Wrigley

Date — Chair of Examining Committee

Phil Kasinitz

Date — Executive Officer

Mitchell Duneier

Nancy Foner

Phil Kasinitz

Robert C. Smith

Julia Wrigley
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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By

Joanna Dreby
Advisor: Julia Wrigley

At the end of the twentieth century, migration to the United States from Mexico has become less selective and more widespread. Women are joining migrant streams and often are choosing to leave children behind when they do so. This dissertation seeks to understand how families manage the international separation of parents and children and, more specifically, the consequences of these new trends for relationships within families.

The study is based on interviews and ethnographic fieldwork with 141 members of Mexican transnational families in the United States and in Mexico and includes the perspectives of migrant mothers and fathers, minor children, and caregivers, who are often grandparents. Analysis focuses on the tensions in relationships between family members. I address tensions related to parents' experiences post-migration, those arising out of children's reactions to parental absence, those stemming from relationships with caregivers, and those caused by neighbors' gossip.

Yet despite numerous sources of tension in transnational relationships, and the emotional difficulties they cause families, parents and children rarely seem to abandon each other during periods of separation. Instead, the tensions that cause families problems almost paradoxically reinforce intergenerational obligation and parents' and children's ties to each other. As such, Mexican transnational families stretch, but often come back together again despite the hardships they experience during periods of separation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vi
1. FAMILY SEPARATION	1
2. *AL NORTE*	55
3. MOTHERS LEAVING CHILDREN	91
4. PARENTS	127
5. ARMANDO LOPEZ: FATHERHOOD	169
6. CHILDREN	193
7. OFELIA AND GERMAN CRUZ: STAND OFF	243
8. CAREGIVERS	261
9. CINDY RODRIGUEZ: IN LIMBO	306
10. NEIGHBORS (GOSSIP)	327
11. FAMILY STRETCH	373
APPENDIX A – FAMILY CONSTELLATIONS	407
APPENDIX B – POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	410
REFRENCES	426

LIST OF TABLES

Page

Table 1: Percent of Mexican Transnational Parents 10

Table 2: Family Migration Patterns of School Students 12

Table 3: Mexican Transnational Mothers' Educational Level 94

Table 4: Mother and Student Migration Patterns 100-1

Table 5: Costs of Phone Communication between N.J. and Oaxaca 115

Table 6: Reciprocity and Obligation in Relationships with Caregivers 300-1

Chapter 1

FAMILY SEPARATION

When I met Nydia[1] on a warm day in late June of 2004, I did not notice her protruding belly until we were seated at the small sofa in a hallway-like living room of the first floor apartment where she lived in New Jersey. So I did not realize she was pregnant until she pointed to her flip flops and complained of swollen feet. That day, Nydia was uncharacteristically open in discussing her son in Mexico as compared to the other women I had interviewed. She said that she saw the effects of parents' migration on children as a schoolteacher in Mexico. "That is why I am worried about my son," she explained. "He will soon be four and will start school. I know that now he will need the attention of his parents even more." Nydia went on to speak with an air of professionalism as she explained her personal dilemma.

Nydia had met her husband Carlos while studying to be a schoolteacher in Mexico. After dating for a couple of years, Nydia became pregnant midway through her master's degree program. So Nydia could continue to teach, she left the infant boy Kevin[2] with her own parents during the week and returned to visit every weekend. When the baby was just six months old, Carlos migrated to the United States. While he had a high school degree, Carlos did not have a specific profession, and worked sporadically finding prospects dismal in Mexico. Like a number of his cousins and brothers had previously

[1] All of the names in the dissertation have been changed to protect the identities of the study's participants.
[2] In cases like this one, I use Anglo pseudo-names for children who had non-Spanish names. In fact, the most common names I encountered among the children of migrant parents were: Jonathan, Kevin and Jennifer.

done, Carlos decided to migrate with hopes that in *el norte* his labor would be more lucrative in providing for his new family.

Dutifully, after just a year, Carlos returned home for his wife and son. While he convinced Nydia to give up her career to join him in New Jersey, they decided that two-year-old Kevin would be better off staying with Nydia's parents, where he had always lived, until Nydia and Carlos could secure a home abroad. For two years, Carlos worked in landscaping and Nydia as a waitress at a local Mexican restaurant. Their marriage had its rocky moments and Nydia often felt distressed at having left Kevin behind. At the time of our interview, she had stopped working due to the pregnancy and was awaiting the birth of her second son within a month. Nydia explained that with the birth of her second son, she and Carlos now planned to return to Mexico to reunite their family.

True to plan, that December after we had first met, Nydia and Carlos filled two cars with all of their belongings and drove all the way from New Jersey to Nydia's home in Guerrero. Unfortunately, the return to Mexico brought with it a new set of tensions. Tired of waitressing, Nydia was eager to return to her profession as a teacher; she also wanted to live with both her children. But she knew it would be difficult to take the then four-year-old Kevin away from her parents, as they had grown extremely attached to the boy. They did all in their power to keep Nydia and Carlos close by. Carlos, however, wasn't keen on joining his in-laws' business of raising and selling chickens. He felt useless earning so little compared to what he had made as a landscaper in New Jersey. Within two months, Carlos and Nydia separated. Nydia set up a storefront business so she could survive on her own and positioned herself for a teaching job the following fall. After just five months, Carlos returned to the United States. Despite the separation, Nydia

continued to describe Carlos as part of the family. Nydia waited for Carlos' phone calls, received money he sent from abroad (although not as much as she would have liked) and periodically contemplated joining him again.

For this couple, migration was rife with family conflict, constant negotiation, and expectations unmet or partially fulfilled. Yet, despite significant tensions, Nydia and Carlos continued describe migration as a means for fulfilling their collective needs, together.

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Nydia and her family's experiences, while particular to them, are certainly not atypical at the start of the twenty-first century. Contemporary scholarship describes the globalization of economic relationships and culture over the past twenty to thirty years; it also describes the ways that families both respond to and shape the global economy and culture through their migration patterns. Families that find they are unable to maintain a household by living together under the same roof often diversify the residences of family members and take advantage of the disparities in the world economy. Able bodied sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, mothers, and fathers move to areas where they can earn more for their human labor while other family members remain in areas where the cost of living is low. Families go transnational (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002).

This dissertation focuses on the consequences of this transnational lifestyle for the intergenerational relationships between Mexican migrants and their non-migrant kin. Specifically, I explore the relationships between migrant mothers and fathers, the

children they leave behind in Mexico when they come to the United States, and the caregivers, most often grandparents, who look after these children. My concern is not with the initial decision to migrate or on experiences of reunification, although inevitably these topics arise. Rather, the dissertation explores how families manage parent-child relationships while living apart. It is based on research that is multi-sited, conducted in Mexico and the United States, and multi-person, including analysis of the experiences of mothers, fathers, minor children, and their caregivers. As in the case of Nydia and her family, under the emotionally charged circumstances of parent-child separation, friction between family members is common. Families must reconcile individual needs with those of the family as a unit while members live in dissimilar environments and experience vastly different daily routines, opportunities, and sources of stress. In exploring both the tensions among families that are stretched over national boundaries as well as the reasons families often come back together after difficult experiences during separation, this dissertation sheds light on what might be considered a previously unexplored "black box" (Pennartz and Niehof 1999) of intra-family negotiations in a transnational world.

FAMILY MIGRATION AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The separation of parents and children due to international migration is not limited to modern times. What scholars often previously termed split-family migration was common a century ago for Chinese, Polish, Jewish, and Italian immigrants to the United States, among others (see Foner 2000; Gabaccia 2001; Nakano Glenn 1983; Thomas and Znaniecki 1927). In the majority of cases, it was men who initially settled

abroad. From 1870 to 1920, more than two-thirds of Italian migrants were men; the majority supported wives and children in Italy with remittances (Gabaccia 2001). Male Chinese immigrants outnumbered women 18:1 in 1860 and 26:1 in 1890, and over half left wives at home in China (Nakano Glenn 1983). Many men gradually brought their family members to the United States when possible, although return migration rates were also high; between 1900 and 1920, over a third of immigrants to the United States returned home (Foner 2000:172). As will be described further in the next chapter, among Mexicans, mid-century U.S. migration policy institutionalized split-family migration patterns. The Bracero Program (1942 -1964) provided men with temporary agricultural work visas but offered no provisions for the migration of their wives and children (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

If the pattern of parent-child separation is not new, neither is the evidence that migration may be disruptive to family relationships. In the pioneer book, *The Polish Peasant*, WI Thomas and Florencio Zonieki (1927) described immigration as dividing family members between those ascribing to old and new world values. They suggested that the ensuing conflicts between families members could lead to wider levels of social disorganization in American immigrant communities specifically, and urban areas more generally (see also Piore 1979). Particularly during the early twentieth century, social workers and others defined the problem of immigration as one of "family disorganization." Both reformers and nativists viewed immigrants as having antiquated customs that hindered modern social life. Immigrant families were considered the primary source of cultural transmission and thus the principal site for social ills ranging from alcoholism to lack of hygiene (which spread disease) to family violence (Irving

2000; Gordon 1988; Sanchez 1993). "The immigrant home was constructed as dysfunctional . . . and the Americanizers repeatedly argued the need for native intervention within that space" (Irving 2000:13). Moreover, though men were often the initial movers in early waves of migration to the United States, immigrant women who joined their families were the targets of most social reform efforts aimed at immigrant families.

New Directions, Old Concerns

Early waves of migration to the United States have often been depicted as almost desperate acts in response to structural conditions, such as industrialization, famine, war, and political repression, and the initial migration of fathers as a culturally bound response to these conditions (Handlin 1959; Nakano Glenn 1983). More recently sociologists and historians, among others, have described migration as a dynamic family strategy rather than an automatic response to changes in the organization of the economy (Bras 2003; Paping 2004; Ryan 2004). Institutional and cultural settings are the backdrop in which families as social units negotiate their economic survival, developing "family adaptive strategies" (see Moen and Wethington 1992). It is during periods of great economic change that families stretch in new ways to accommodate shifting personal and family goals.

Today a specific type of transnational family is becoming more and more common, one in which mothers migrate and leave children behind. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) have labeled the phenomenon "transnational motherhood." Migrant mothers leaving their children behind were not unheard of during earlier periods. As DeWind and Kasinitz (1997) suggest, with U.S. immigration, it often seems that

"everything old is new again." West Indian women, for example, have been leaving children with grandmothers to work in New York City since the 1920s (Soto 1987; Watkins-Owens 2001). Sarasüa (2002) found that wet nurses in 18th century Spain left their infants with their husbands to work in the city of Madrid. These early cases, however, appear to be unusual. A study of family separation among U.S. immigrants in 1910 found that only 7 percent of immigrant women across ethnic groups had left their children in their home country when they came to the United States (Robles and Watkins 1993). At the end of the 20th century, transnational mothering has been reported around the globe, from Turkish women in Germany, to Colombians in Spain, and Filipinas in Canada, Hong Kong, and Italy (Chang 2000; Cohen 2000; Constable 1999; Erel 2002; Lan 2003; Salazar-Parreñas 2001; Sørenson 2005). The increased frequency of this migration pattern suggests a major shift in the ways families seek to fulfill individual and household needs.

This relatively new pattern of mothers migrating without their children has generated great interest in the print media and has led many to decry the impact of migration on the family. Echoing complaints heard nearly 100 years earlier, once again, women's activities have been a major cause of concern. This time, the lens has focused on the fate of children left behind by mothers who migrate to work. According to Rachel Salazar-Parreñas, who has studied Filipino transnational families extensively: "Much academic and newspaper writing on transnational families assumes that children growing up in the Philippines without their parents, particularly their mothers, are prone to delinquency and declining moral values, particularly materialism" (Salazar-Parreñas 2005:39). And journalist Sonia Nazario, who undertook a perilous journey on trains

through Mexico and across the U.S. border to write about the odyssey of young Central Americans making a similar trek north, states that with her book *Enrique's Journey*, "my hope is that they (Latina mothers) fully understand the consequences of leaving their children and make better informed decisions. Because, in the end, *these separations almost always end badly*" (Nazario 2006:xxv; emphasis added). Today, critics argue that one of the consequences of transnational lifestyles is the general disorganization of the family and, specifically, the abandonment of children by migrant mothers.

Scope of the "Problem"

Given rising public concern over parents who leave children behind when they migrate to the United States, among other destinations, it is crucial to determine exactly how common such family separations are. Data from small-scale studies provide a glimpse of what is seemingly an important phenomenon, particularly among domestic workers and certain ethnic groups within the United States. For example, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) reports that of 153 Latina domestic workers in Los Angeles she interviewed, 40 percent of 114 mothers had children in their country of origin. One Boston study found that 85 percent of 385 immigrant students had been separated from one or both parents at some point during the migration process. While 63 percent of Chinese children in the sample were separated from parents before coming to the United States, fully 95 percent of Haitian and Central American children and 85 percent of Mexican children experienced such separation (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie 2002).

Surveys of nationally representative samples of U.S. immigrants, however, are inadequate for estimating the prevalence of transnational parenting practices generally,

and among Mexicans specifically. For one, collecting representative data from undocumented populations is inherently problematic. It is estimated that between 80 and 85 percent of Mexicans arriving in the United States between 1995 and 2005 were undocumented (Passel 2006), and that in 2002 nearly 52 percent of all Mexicans immigrants were undocumented (Passel 2004). As transnational parenting is likely to be greatly affected by immigrants' legal status, any estimates must include undocumented Mexicans. Datasets that generally do a good job of capturing information from the undocumented, such as the U.S. Census, do not include questions that would permit accurate estimates of the percent of immigrant mothers and fathers with children in Mexico.

Regardless of these difficulties, we have some clues to the prevalence of parent-child separation among Mexican transnational families. For one, a study of immigrant children in Boston found that among Mexicans, 42 percent were separated from mothers and 82 percent from fathers prior to migration (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie 2002). More importantly, a survey conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center in the Mexican Consulates of Los Angeles, Fresno, New York, Chicago, Dallas, Raleigh and Atlanta in 2004 and 2005 provides the closest thing to a national estimate, as the sample resembles Current Population Survey data on indicators such as gender and age distribution[3] (Suro 2005). Table 1 shows that among those surveyed across all sites (N=4836), 18 percent of all immigrants surveyed and more than one in four parents had one or more children in Mexico. Transnational fathering was the most common, with 38 percent of fathers sampled having all or some of their children in Mexico. But a significant proportion of mothers, 15 percent, also had children in Mexico. Perhaps most interesting is that while

[3] This data is available on-line at http://pewhispanic.org/datasets/.

fathers were much more likely than mothers to have all of their children in Mexico, mothers and fathers were almost equally likely to have some children in Mexico and some in the United States.

TABLE 1: Percent of Mexican Transnational Parents according to Pew Hispanic Center Survey of Mexican Migrants at Select Mexican Consulates, 2004-2005

	All children in Mexico	**Some children in Mexico**	**Total Transnational Parents**
Mexican migrant mothers	7%	8%	15%
Mexican migrant fathers	28%	10%	38%
Mexican migrant parents	18%	9%	27%

Moreover, data from the Pew Hispanic Center survey suggest that transnational parenting may be more common in the new destinations of Mexican migration outside of the Southwest, which have emerged throughout the continental United States since the 1990s (Millard and Chapa 2004; Zuñiga and Hernández-Leon 2005). Of parents surveyed in Fresno and Los Angeles, California, 4 and 9 percent respectively had all of their children living Mexico. Yet in Raleigh, North Carolina, where statewide the Mexican population grew 1,865 percent between 1990 and 2000 (Grieco 2003), 21 percent of parents surveyed had all of their children in Mexico. Additionally, of those surveyed in

all sites and who had arrived in the United States within the past two years, 23 percent had all of their children in Mexico. Transnational parenting appears to be an important feature of contemporary Mexican migration patterns.

Viewed from the perspective of families in Mexico, separation from parents due to U.S. migration appears to be a particularly common experience for children, especially for those living in areas with high levels of out migration. For example, in a survey of 7,061 students in grades 6 to 12 in Zacatecas, a state in Central Mexico with a long history of migration to the United States, Kandel (1998) found that 38 percent of students had a father who had been to the United States at least once. A smaller sample of sixth graders also surveyed in Zacatecas (N=310) found that at any given time 34 percent of students had one or both of their parents away working in the United States (Aguilera-Guzman et al. 2004). Yet there appears to be substantial variation within Mexico as to the extent of transnational parenting in different communities. Table 2 shows results from surveys I distributed to over 4,000 Mexican school students in the states of Puebla and Oaxaca[4]. I found that in three urban schools in Puebla, between 50 and 60 percent of students had relatives working in the United States. But in the 18 rural schools in the lower Mixteca region of Oaxaca I visited, over 90 percent of the students reported that some of their relatives worked in the United States. While in Puebla only between 2 and 6 percent of students had one or both parents working in the United States, in nearly half of the 18 rural schools, more than one in four students had one or both parents working in the United States at the time of the survey.

[4] Surveys were conducted with all students present in each school on the day of the survey.

TABLE 2: Family Migration Patterns among Middle and High School Students Surveyed in Select Schools in Oaxaca and Puebla, 2004-2005

School [5]	**Some family in US**	**Nuclear family in US**[6]	**One or both parents in US**
Puebla	*% students*	*% students*	*% students*
Tehuacan HS	50	16	2
Tehuacan HS	60	7	4
Tehuacan MS	59	15	6
Mixteca, Oax.			
San Marcos MS	100	74	28
Tlapancingo. HS	96	77	22
Tlapancingo. MS	95	70	21
Calihuala MS	97	62	31
Santa Cruz MS	96	69	26
Santa Rosa MS	100	64	29
Tamazola HS	98	57	23
Tamazola MS	96	61	26
Guadalupe HS	98	68	15
Guadalupe MS	93	60	22
Zocoteaca MS	100	96	18
San Nicolas MS	100	71	17
Mariscala HS	97	71	29
Mariscala MS	96	53	20
Huajuapan MS	89	34	19
Coast, Oax.			
San Jose HS	90	55	21
San Jose MS	89	48	19

[5] MS= Middle School, HS=High School
[6] Includes siblings and/or parents.

Byproducts of a Mexican Migration Strategy

Concern about the impact of parental migration on Mexican children is rising. Accounts of academic problems among children of U.S. migrants are fairly common. For example, one Mexican school director interviewed for a recent National Public Radio report stated:

> Out of 73 children in one class, 10 have neither of their parents here. . . When they don't have their father or mother, they lack confidence . . . in the academic sphere. It means that they will be more likely to miss school and to drop out. They are also less respectful of their grandmothers or uncles or their teachers. (Garcia-Navarro 2006)

This comment echoes accounts from teachers and school administrators I interviewed in the Mixteca of Oaxaca. According to one Director, "It [migration] is a real problem . . . I don't know what to do with some of these children. One girl doesn't have a place to live. Both her parents are in the United States and she keeps moving back and forth between different relatives. She doesn't have anyone and is a real problem in school."

Journalists and others have also suggested that when children experience trouble at home, they often seek out their parents by crossing illegally into the United States (Garcia-Navarro 2006; Marizco 2004; Nazario 2006). Indeed, the number of minors illegally crossing the border appears to be rising. In 2002, Border Patrol officers arrested 35,000 minors attempting to cross the border (Hansen 2003). Between October 1, 2003 and September 30, 2004, 43,536 minor children were detained while attempting illegal

entry (U.S. Customs and Border Patrol as cited in Marizco 2004). Shelters have popped up along border communities to receive captured minors. In places where shelters do not exist, local authorities generally release minors to the streets since no legal guardians can claim them (Hansen 2003; Marizco 2004; Nazario 2006).

Not all children are caught while crossing the border. Reunification with parents in the United States is common for young Latinos (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez Orozco 2001). Problems, however, do not necessarily end there. Psychologists and others have suggested that anxiety and depression may be common among immigrant children who had previously been separated from their parents (Artico 2003; Mitrani, Santisteban, and Muir 2004; Smith, Lalonde, and Johnson 2004; Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie 2000). Research also suggests that gangs may look to these discontented adolescent youth as new recruits, particularly in the New York-New Jersey region (Menjivar 2000; Smith 2006).

Managing Family Separation

This brief review of patterns of parent-child separation historically and among Mexican families today suggests that families strategize to fulfill needs of the household through parents' migration, but the decision to do so presents considerable risks to parent-child relationships. We might predict that the pressures of international separation erode parent-child relationships over time, with those families who live apart the longest experiencing the greatest levels of "family disorganization" to use the term popular among social workers in the early part of the twentieth century.

Reports from the members of Mexican transnational families I interviewed during periods of separation do show that migration is rife with conflict, but contrary to the

concerns reported in the media, parents do not typically permanently separate from or abandon their children while in the United States. Instead I find that paradoxically the tensions that arise during periods of separation often lead parents and children to reinforce their ties to each other. This is not to say that the pressures of international separation are not difficult; often they appear to have had a lasting impact on family relationships. Over time, however, the resulting tensions rarely seem to extinguish parent-child bonds, for the migratory experience tends to emphasize the ideological importance of the family as a unit. As one woman said of her own family's experiences with migration, there are "moments of happiness and rage, but in this [family members] go together."

At the crux of this dissertation is the idea that any family migration strategy involves the accommodation of its members' evolving needs and expectations of each other. Focusing attention on the ways families handle the different demands and opportunities of two geographic spaces, and the tensions they cause for intergenerational relationships, reveals that Mexican families are far from disorganized. Indeed, despite individual variations, there are marked patterns in the ways mothers, fathers, children, and their caregivers manage international separation. In what follows, I describe these patterns. I explore the reciprocal expectations essential to the functioning of Mexican transnational families over time and how pressures arising from separation often affect family members' abilities to fulfill these expectations of each other. I discuss the ways these difficulties compel families to stretch yet simultaneously reinforce ideological constructs of the Mexican family during periods of separation. In the end I suggest that by better understanding how families organize their lives transnationally we gain insight

into why the family continues to be a meaningful social group even for individuals who do not live together.

FAMILY MIGRATION STRATEGIES

Sociologists and others studying the social worlds of migrants have developed many insights into the nature of migration, two of which are seem particularly relevant in analyzing contemporary patterns in Mexican family migration. First, they have shown a transnational perspective to be useful in describing migrants' experiences since most maintain significant ties with people in their communities of origin while simultaneously forging new ties in the communities to which they migrate. Second, scholars have shown the vast importance of social networks not only in facilitating migration, but also in shaping family migration patterns. Regarding the latter, the work of Douglas Massey and others on Mexican migration has been particularly telling. They have shown that while initially male heads of household, usually those with some social standing, predominate among migrants, over time communities of origin become transformed by migration, which becomes less selective and more widespread (see Massey et al. 1987; Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994).

These insights into the cumulative nature of migrant networks and the transnational relationships they involve may have important implications for our understanding of family migration strategies. As migration becomes more widespread, an increasing number of women may join migration streams. Indeed today worldwide, female migration rates in many countries are rapidly matching and, in some cases, outpacing migration rates among men (UNFPA 2006). Moreover, the transnational nature

of social networks may mean that families are increasingly choosing migration patterns that involve long periods of family separation since they can presumably maintain relationships with family members through dense transnational ties. These possibilities may be particularly important for women, and mothers, and may account for the increasingly common prevalence of transnational mothering.

Yet there has been surprisingly little research into the ways families deal with separation, particularly as family migration strategies may change over time. Indeed most research investigating migratory social networks has emphasized the ways they inspire migration decisions, facilitate human trafficking and smuggling, differentially determine men and women's access to employment and community services, and influence experiences of adaptation among immigrants of different racial and ethnic groups upon arrival. According to Massey and his collaborators,

> Migrant networks consist of social ties that link sending communities to specific points of destination in receiving societies. These ties bind migrants and nonmigrants within a complex web of complementary social roles and interpersonal relationships that are maintained by an informal set of mutual expectations and prescribed behaviors. (Massey et al 1987:139)

Yet how exactly do these "complex web of social roles" work? What are the "set of mutual expectations" that are the underlying glue to these social networks? What happens to "interpersonal relationships" when they are maintained across national boundaries?

The extent to which transnational social networks shape, and are shaped by, families' experiences of separation have yet to be fully explored.

The Migrant Household

Notwithstanding the theoretical gap in our understanding of how transnational social networks operate within family relationships, there is a long-standing traditional in migration studies of using the household as the primary unit of analysis (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Anthropologists have been careful to distinguish families from households; the latter refers to the primary social unit of consumption and the reproduction of labor whereas the former is a culturally specific group of kin (Fletcher 1999). In other words, a migrant father may be a member of one family if he lives in the United States with his wife and his children live with his sister in Mexico. However, he contributes economically to two households, one in the United States and one in Mexico. Studies of household strategies have generally referred to the ways international migration fulfills or fails to fulfill productive, reproductive and consumer needs of one–or possibly both–of these two households.

Perspectives on family separation differ depending on which household is under the social science microscope. Research on Mexican migrant households, for example, might distinguish, as Massey et al. have done (1987), between "temporary migration" and "recurrent migration." Temporary migrants work abroad for a targeted period of time to earn a specific amount of money; they return home once this goal has been achieved. In contrast, recurrent migrants work abroad consistently; "their occupation is literally that of a migrant worker" (Massey et al. 1987:177). These workers may return to their primary households seasonally according to their work schedule abroad. We might expect that the

effect of parental absence on children would differ according to which strategy, temporary or recurrent, a household relies upon. For example, seasonal male migrants from Mexico have been accused by their wives of being "*padres de cheque no más"* [fathers only by check] (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:67). Since these men spend so little time with their children, their fatherly role becomes defined solely by their economic contribution to their children.

In contrast, research on immigrant households in host countries often describes family separation as part and parcel of a "serial" or "step" migration strategy as has been particularly common in the Caribbean as well as in Mexico (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Olwig 1999; Smith, Lalonde, and Johnson 2004; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2001). Family separation during serial migration has been described as taking one of three forms: (1) fathers migrate first, leaving children and wives behind who they send for later (at times one at a time); (2) fathers and mothers migrate together and send for their children at a later date (Smith, Lalonde, and Johnson 2004); and (3) mothers migrate first and later send for their husbands and children. When the unit of the analysis is the immigrant household, experiences of family separation have been described in terms of how they affect processes of immigrant adaptation or assimilation.

Pitfalls of the Household Strategy Approach to Migration

Scholars have pointed out a number of problems with using the household as the primary unit of analysis, two of which are pertinent to this study. First, this approach assumes that households act as collectives, presuming unity in intention where none may exist (Cerrutti and Massey 2001; Fomby 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Pennartz and Niehof 1999; Pessar 1999). Second, it assumes that households are inherently altruistic

and that it is in the best interest of all members of the families that the migration strategy be successful (Becker 1991; Folbre 1986; Folbre 2001; Fomby 2005). In other words, migration is assumed to benefit all members of a household equally.

Feminist scholars have been instrumental in showing the ways these assumptions can be misguided. Studies of women's participation in migration show that men and women do not always share common goals and objectives while relying on a household migration strategy. For example, in the case of Mexican families, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) describes Mexican women as actively pursuing their own agendas that involved "persuading the men" in their lives to support their migration (p. 70). In general, Latin American women's agency in migration decisions has often been overlooked and underemphasized (Poggio and Woo 2000).

Studies of gender and migration also show that men and women's ability to reap the benefits of migration is a function of their relative power in the household (Fomby 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; Pessar 1999). For example, some have suggested that as Mexican men have generally had more decision-making power than women in their families, it is primarily male breadwinners who make the decision to migrate. Mexican women are consequently left in a disadvantaged and vulnerable position, remaining in Mexico and assuming full responsibility for maintaining the household while their husbands are away (Marroni 2000). Other scholars have found that once in the United States, immigrant women tend to prefer settlement while their husbands aspire to return migration due to men's relative loss of power as low-wage workers and women's relative gains in power as they enter the workforce (Hirsch 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

The household strategies model has been critiqued most successfully by those

oriented to the way power in the household is distributed on gender lines. But there is also evidence on the ways that power between generations is crucial to shaping household migration strategies. For example, Goodson-Lawes (1993) suggests that while younger Mexican women may have greater autonomy in their personal relationships when they come to the United States, older women may experience a loss of authority as the traditional structures that grant them power and respect unravel in the United States. Menjivar (2000) explains why a similar dynamic occurs among the Salvadoran families she studied.

> [G]randaparents' social status has been diminished and their socially expected roles often reversed . . . Sometimes their presence is more a burden than a welcome addition. But, according to cultural norms, it is expected that the children will take care of parents and that a measure of obedience and respect will accompany such filial obligations. However, the new context often curtails the children's . . . wishes to fulfill these expectations. [They] are not always in a financial position to provide such assistance. (p. 196)

In contrast to older immigrants, research suggests that immigrant children may experience an increase in relative power vis-à-vis their parents once in the United States. This may be attributed to children's greater English proficiency than their parents and their greater comfort with U.S. institutions via public school enrollment (Orrellana 2001; Orrellana et al. 2001; Wrigley and Dreby 2005). "The social role of the younger group has been expanded and strengthened and their status enhanced" (Menjivar 2000:213).

Young children may be called on to interpret for parents at doctor's appointments, which can embarrass parents when children learn of medical problems they consider personal. This can cause problems for parents if children misunderstand adult matters or if they translate poorly due to their own language limitations. Immigrant children also may have greater power to mediate between school and home when migrant parents are busy working (Menjivar 2000).

In short, the household strategies model of analyzing migration portrays household members as being unified. In doing so, conflict, tension and power relations within the household, on lines of both gender and generation are ignored, unnoticed or discounted.

Transnational Families

Research on migrant households foregrounds experiences either here (in the host country) or there (in the home country) since in traditional studies the focus is on one site of consumption and reproduction. Yet using the lens of transnationalism as an analytical tool to understand both the "here" and "there" is increasingly important to evaluating contemporary migrant lifestyles in a period of increased "globalization" (Foner 2000; Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc 1998; Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999; Smith 2000; Smith and Guarnizo 1999). From the transnational perspective, migrants become "culturally 'trans-nationalized', incorporating ideologies, practice, expectations and political claims from both societies to create a 'culture of migration' that is distinct from the culture of both the sending and receiving nation" (Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994:1501). Transnationalism has been theorized as consisting of social fields, processes, and communities, among others. Studies drawing on this perspective range in

focus from analysis of political ties (home-town associations), to economic ties (remittances), technology, and identity (see Kyle 2001; Levitt 2001; Mahler 1999; Menjivar et al. 1998; Orozco 2000; Schiller and Fouran 1999; Suro 2003). As in studies of migratory households, by default the family is one of the underlying principal units of analysis since the transnational interactions that scholars analyze are most often than not undertaken among and between family members. For example, remittances are most often money exchanges among family members. Technologies such as wireless phone communication are generally used for family members to communicate with each other. And, transnational political participation is embedded in and supported by familial relationships (Smith 2006).

For the most part transnational scholars have avoided the mistaken assumptions of household strategy models by highlighting the power dynamics involved in the maintenance of multiple households spanning two nations. Many recent studies pay particular attention to how gender shapes the transnational experience (Alicea 1997; Aranda 2007; Argüelles and Rivero 1993; D'Aubeterre 2000; Kyle 1999; Levitt 2001). For example, Hirsch (2003) describes how shifting views of sexuality among Mexican migrant women are also evident among their younger female relatives who stay behind in Mexico, leading to an overall shift in expectations of marriage. Smith (2006) discusses how gender bargains between men and women differ according to place, so that relationships among couples in New York are not the same as they are when the same couples return to Mexico for a short visit. Power differences within families are thus particularly important to evaluating the consequences of transnational life.

Intergenerational Relationships

Generation in transnational family research has received less widespread attention. However, sparked by recent media attention on stories of parent-child separation, a number of new studies look more extensively and specifically at generational relationships in transnational families. Initially, most work explored the experiences of transnational mothers working as domestic workers in foreign countries (Cohen 2000; Constable 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Salazar-Parreñas 2001). These studies emphasize the contradictions involved in women leaving their own children in order to care for the children of employers in wealthier nations, and describe the deep emotional repercussions of doing so for migrating mothers (see Lan 2003; Cohen 2000; Constable 1999; Salazar-Parreñas 2001). They also describe the networks of care necessary in home countries for such arrangements to function (Schmalzbauer 2005a), which may include migrant adult children's responsibilities to their parents in their country of origin (Fomby 2005; Levitt 2001).

Others have explored transnational family configurations, including those in which women and/or children move abroad for educational opportunities while the family's economic activity continues to be carried out in the country of origin (Waters 2002; Zhou 1998). They suggest that families are quite flexible and that children may gain educational and economic benefits from such flexibility. Indeed, some research in Mexico suggests that U.S. migration may have direct benefits even for children left behind. Research has found that child and infant health in Mexican communities is better among families with U.S. migrants than those without migrants (Frank 2005a;

Kanaiaupuni and Donato 1999). Family members' migration is also associated with better grades and more years of school completion for Mexican students, which is assumed to be related to an increase in overall financial resources for the family (Hanson and Woodruff 2003; Kandel and Kao 2001). By virtue of having access to remittances, children in migrant families may be better off than their peers without migrant family members (see Cohen 2004).

Finally, some scholars focus on the emotional aspects of transnational family life, particularly for children, over the long run (Levitt 2001). Research suggests that children of migrant men may withdraw emotionally from their fathers; children of migrant mothers may feel they lack intimacy and affection and have been abandoned (Salazar-Parreñas 2005). Moreover, when young immigrants are reunited with parents, families may have a difficult time adjusting to one another after long periods of separation. The ensuing family conflict may be particularly distressing for adolescents, who may have trouble adapting to their parents' authority or communicating with them (Artico 2003; Menjivar 2000; Smith, Lalone, and Johnson 2004; Waters 2002). One study found levels of depression to be higher among immigrant children in the United States who experienced separation prior to migration than among those who migrated with their parents (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie 2002). Smith (2006) describes Mexican youth who felt extremely resentful of migrant parents who left them behind as being the most violent and aggressive members of Mexican youth gangs. Finally, the emotional costs of separation may affect children's educational prospects. Research suggests that in contrast to Mexican children with other migrant relatives who may actually have better grades than those without migrants in the family, children with migrant parents may do

worse academically than children living with both their parents, have fewer educational aspirations, and may be more likely to drop out of school (Gioguli 2004; Kandel 1998; Kandel and Kao 2001; Perez Lopez 2003).

Of Unity in Conflict

In summary, it is difficult to hypothesize about the consequences of separation for intergenerational relationships in Mexican transnational families as existing evidence presents a bit of a puzzle. On the one hand, we have seen that ties among transnational families are fairly robust, so much so that they shape migration patterns and even transform entire communities in Mexico when social networks become cemented into a culture of migration. The separation of parents and children may constitute a common household strategy that can be recurrent or temporary in intention. Transnational families may be uniquely flexible in adapting to individual family members' needs by taking advantage of the best of both worlds to balance labor, educational, and child care needs in their families. Additionally, transnational ties may involve multiple networks of interdependence that provide benefits for children as well as the older adults who care for them. In short, analyses suggest that reciprocity and mutual obligation between family members in different countries are the bulwark of transnational life (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Kyle 2001; Levitt 2001; Smith 2006). In other words, as Levitt (2001) suggests, "By redistributing power, status and decision making within the household, migrants and nonmigrants ensure their continued commitment to each other" (p. 89).

On the other hand, members of transnational families do not necessarily share common interests, particularly while living in such different environments with very

different demands and social expectations. Power differences within families along gender lines may be particularly important, with women bearing the brunt of the emotional labor necessary to keep transnational social networks intact (Alicea 1997; Aranda 2007). Changing gender expectations in different contexts may be a common source of conflict. So too, the expectations related to generation–both the young and old–may affect the distribution of the family's limited emotional and economic resources. Children left behind may benefit in some ways financially from their parents' migration, but it may come at a extremely high emotional cost, in effect resulting in a number of unintended consequences such as the low levels of academic achievement among children of migrant parents in Mexico.

So how can we reconcile these different perspectives, the one emphasizing the negative consequences of family separation, what I described in the introduction as "family disorganization", or what Smith (2006) has called the "darker side" of transnationalism, and the other emphasizing strong, more smoothly flowing and fruitful social networks? How can we account for experiences of both family unity and turmoil in the transnational context? In their efforts to theorize how families participate in transnational processes, have scholars simply overlooked the costs of transnational lifestyles for the most vulnerable family members, children? Or perhaps it is a selection issue. In other words, families in which children and mothers are separated may constitute a sub-set of transnational families in which problems are concentrated.

To date research on family separation cannot adequately answer these questions or explain the relationship between experiences of conflict and unity in transnational families. Despite recent contributions, few studies specifically highlight the consequences

of parent-child separation, focus on gender in transnational parenting by contrasting the experiences of migrant fathers to those of migrant mothers, or include children's experiences of separation. Moreover, those researchers that have included children's perspectives have interviewed adult children or children who have since been reunited with their parents (Artico 2003; Olwig 1999; Salazar-Parreñas 2005; Smith, Lalonde, and Johnson 2004; Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie 2002). While highly important in analyzing the long-term consequences of family separation, these studies cannot describe the dynamic ways children, while they are children, interact with their parents and other family members during periods of separation. And although recent survey research with minor children in Mexico suggests that parents' migration has some adverse implications for children's schooling (see Gioguli 2004; Kandel 1998; Kandel and Kao 2001; Perez Lopez 2003), it cannot explore the family dynamics that may contribute to academic problems.

In the end, the puzzle of how transnational families simultaneously cooperate and negotiate intergenerational conflict while they are living apart has yet to be fully understood. The trick is to empirically "captur[e] the coexistence of extensive conflicts and pervasive cooperation in household arrangements" (Sen 1990:125). To illustrate the nature of these "cooperative conflicts" (Sen 1990), research that foregrounds children's relationships with their family members *while they are experiencing separation* is needed.

Due to a unique research design, this study captures the experiences of migrant parents, children and their caregivers during periods of separation. Like other studies of transnational families, I consider the dynamic relationship between migrants' households

in both Mexico and in the United States. I include stories of temporary migrants, recurrent migrants and serial migrants, although given the fluidity in family migration strategies I avoid these three typologies in what follows. Instead I use a typology of the four most common types of parental separation in Mexican transnational families: (1) father only migrants, (2) single mother migrants, (3) married parents in the United States, and (4) divorced or separated parents in the United States. Drawing on the contributions of research on gender and generation in migrant families, I pay specific attention to each family member's relative power in shaping the transnational arrangement. Cognizant of research that suggests long-term impacts of separation on parent-child relationships, I focus on how family members' experiences change over time, emphasizing the consequences of the transnational mode of life. As I am able to incorporate the perspectives of young children as well as older children, mothers, fathers, and caregivers while they are experiencing separation, this study makes a unique contribution to our understanding transnational family functioning.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

Before turning to a description of the research methods that made this contemporaneous study of parent-child separation possible, I outline the subsequent chapters of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 provides a context for analyzing contemporary Mexican transnational families by exploring historical patterns in Mexican migration, and how they may be shaped by culturally based definitions of the family. It considers the significance of an increasing number of mothers joining the migrant stream north. In Chapter 3 I ask why

Mexican mothers are increasingly on the move and leaving their children behind. I explore the demographics of migrating mothers, and then turn to their stories about their migration decisions as they compare to those of migrant fathers.

In Chapter 4, I examine the ways gender shapes transnational parenting. I describe how parents communicate with their children from a distance and the tensions resulting from parents' experiences post migration. I outline the ways gender expectations of parenthood emerge when parents and children live apart. Using a case study of the family of migrant Armando Lopez, Chapter 5 explores how gender expectations may be challenged, and new opportunities for fatherhood emerge, when parents divorce post-migration.

In Chapter 6, I turn more fully to children's experiences after their parents' migration, focusing specifically on the tensions they experience with parents and the ways their reactions vary at different ages. Chapter 7 looks at the causes of a fairly common dynamic in families by spotlighting the relationship between migrant Ofelia Cruz and her son German, whose emotional responses to separation led to an impasse between mother and son.

In Chapter 8 I explore the stakes the caregivers of children left behind have in the transnational family arrangements. This chapter highlights the ways caregivers in Mexico ultimately contribute to the maintenance of family commitments during periods of separation. However, as a result, children may end up feeling caught in the middle between two families, not belonging in either. Chapter 9 explores this dynamic by narrating Cindy Rodriguez's reactions to her mother Paula's absence.

In Chapter 10, I analyze the roles neighbors play in simultaneously provoking familial conflict but also, like Mexican caregivers, in supporting the idea of familial obligation. Chapter 11 returns more squarely to the theme of the family stretch. Like other studies, I show that separation causes much discord between family members. At the same time, though, separation protects Mexican transnational families from some of the difficulties faced by families who live every day together. Moreover, the overarching goals of migration reinforce, rather than undermine, many of the ideological tenets of the Mexican family. Mexican families are usually able to come back together again even after having lived apart for years, having experienced high levels of conflict, and having had many of their expectations of each other unmet.

TRACKING CONTEMPORARY MEXICAN FAMILY MIGRATION PATTERNS

The constant international movement of people and things common at the turn of the twenty first century has fostered new methods of social research, particularly in the development of an ethnography that "follows the people" (Marcus 1998:90 also see Buraway 2000). Transnational migration scholars have been the pioneers in a plethora of studies that attempt to capture migrant realities in both home and host countries to better understand what it means to have a transnational existence (Grassmuck and Pessar 1991; Levitt 2001; Mahler 1998; Smith 2006). In step with these scholars, I employed a multi-sited approach to the study of Mexican transnational families. The project consisted of a total of 139 interviews with members of transnational families living in New Jersey and Oaxaca, Mexico and included in-depth research with a select group of 12 families in both

countries. In what follows I refer by name only to the individuals from this select group of families unless otherwise indicated. A short description of each of these 12 families is found in Appendix A. All names have been changed to protect the identities of the study's participants.

Exploring intra-family negotiations required foregrounding four analytical themes in the project's methodology. First, as the migration of Mexican mothers without their children is a relatively new pattern and since gender has been shown to be key to power relations within families, a comparison between families in which mothers and fathers migrate was paramount. Second, given the lack of attention to children's experiences in migration, the study required the inclusion of young children's perspectives on their families' migration. Third, as family relationships are often in flux and may be more so during periods of migration, it was critical to explore families' experiences over time. Fourth, families' experiences needed to be framed within the context of their respective communities and their families. I now turn to a description of how the research design addressed each of these themes as well as some of the insights about families' experiences these four methodological concerns yielded.

Gender and Mexican Migration

Initially, I sought interviews with Mexican migrants residing in Central New Jersey in and around the city of New Brunswick. I was already familiar with the Mexican immigrant community in New Brunswick through a variety of professional and volunteer activities. I am not Mexican or even Latina, but am fluent in Spanish with experience working with Spanish-speaking populations both internationally and locally starting in 1997, as a social service administrator, ESL teacher, and community organizer.

At the time of the study, New Brunswick was home to many Mexican immigrants, and it can be considered a new destination of Mexican migration (see Smith 2006; Zuñiga and Hernanádez 2005). The Census 2000 estimated that 12.6 percent of the total population of the city was Mexican foreign born up from 1.3 percent ten years earlier. Home to approximately 48,000 residents in 2000, New Brunswick is located on the train line between New York City and the state capitol of Trenton. Within the city limits are two major hospitals, the main campus of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey and the world headquarters of Johnson and Johnson. While in many ways a vibrant city, the residential population is not as wealthy as the institutions based there. In 2000, 27 percent of the city's residents lived below the poverty line, compared to 12.4 percent nationally and just 8.5 percent in the state of New Jersey. The median family income in New Brunswick was $38,222 as compared to $50,046 nationally and $65,370 in the state of New Jersey (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

Initially I was interested in the little known experiences of migrating mothers. As an ESL teacher, I had come to know many families personally. My initial contacts with Mexican mothers came through my friends and co-organizers at a grassroots ESL school. Later, I visited many Mexican families' homes with Raul, my boyfriend, then husband, then ex-husband, a Mexican immigrant from the state of Veracruz who had lived in New Brunswick since 1993. After our son, Christian Cuauhtemoc (nicknamed Temo), was born in 2002, conversations with friends in the Mexican community naturally turned towards child rearing. I was party to numerous informal conversations with transnational mothers about their child care arrangements and observed how flexible these arrangements were over time as family members came and left the United States.

Unlike Latinas in California featured in research on domestic workers (see Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Salazar-Parreñas 2001; Wrigley 1995), the transnational mothers I met typically worked in fast food restaurants and factories and for cleaning companies. In many ways their labor experiences were similar to those of men who worked in factories and relied on temporary agencies located throughout the city to find work upon arrival (see Ortega 2006). In other ways, however, men's experiences were distinct. Many Mexican men in New Brunswick worked in landscaping, construction, and private restaurants. When I arrived in New Brunswick in 1997, men greatly outnumbered women. They mostly lived along and frequented a major commercial street named French Street, although some local residents called it "little Mexico." Storefronts in this part of town include "Oaxaqueña Grocery", "Costa Chica Restaurant" and "El Poblano"; the names reflect the home communities of most migrants, who are from the Mixteca and coastal regions of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Puebla. Men typically worked odd hours and night shifts, and could be seen on city streets any day of the week. On Sundays, they played soccer in local parks (see Sahn 2004a).

By 2006, the Mexican population had spread throughout the city. Women and children had become a significant presence. The three Catholic churches all offered mass in Spanish. A local Mexican-American Organization began organizing two festivals per year, one for the Cinco de Mayo and another for Mexican Independence Day in September. Mexican children had also become a significant presence, crowding the local library every day after school with other Latino students (Sahn 2004b). In 2004, in five of the eight elementary schools, over 70 percent of students spoke primarily Spanish at

home and at least one in three students were labeled Limited English proficient (New Jersey Department of Education 2004).

I initiated formal interviews with Mexican transnational parents in 2003. Although initially interested in women's experiences, I included interviews with fathers for comparative purposes. In total, I conducted systematic interviews in Spanish with 22 mothers and 23 fathers who had lived apart from their minor children in Mexico[7]. I did not elicit interviews through any of the organizations where I had worked; rather I approached individuals I already knew and received referrals via friends and families of parents with children in Mexico. As Raul and I had amicably separated by the time I initiated research, he provided few direct referrals for interviews. Yet I found that many interviewees knew of me by reputation either as Raul's wife or as an ESL teacher.

At the time of the interviews, all but three of those who I interviewed were undocumented. Many of the women were periodically unemployed and also sold catalog products or Mexican food items to their family and friends. Men also experienced seasonal unemployment during the winter months when work in construction and landscaping typically declined. Fourteen mothers and nine fathers had children in the United States as well as in Mexico when interviewed. Most mothers had lived apart from their children in Mexico for between one and four years; most fathers had been away between five and nine years. While I concentrated on locating parents who were currently separated from their children, I interviewed three mothers who had since been reunited with children in the United States.

[7] A table that summarizes specific details on each individual interviewed is purposively excluded from this dissertation so as to protect the privacy of these individuals.

During interviews I asked parents about why they migrated to the United States, the care arrangements for their children in Mexico, how often they were in touch with their children and in what ways, how they felt about living apart, and about their plans for the future. I met 13 parents on two or three occasions and another nine parents, some of whom I had known for years, even more frequently. Cognizant of the importance of technology to the maintenance of transnational ties, I often viewed videotapes or photographs of parents' children and their hometowns and was able to listen in on some phone conversations with children in Mexico. Interviews were open-ended in format; my goal was to address the issues listed on my interview schedule, but not necessarily in any given order. Only four parents allowed me to tape-record them. In most cases I took detailed notes during interviews or, in some cases, afterwards.

I interviewed over half of the parents in their own homes. As all families lived with others, parents often requested I interview them when no one else was home. Mothers, in particular, asked that I come before their husbands returned home from work. When parents did not have enough privacy or a comfortable place to sit and talk in the rooms they rented in area apartments, I invited them to my home for the interview. Some fathers, for example, rented sleeping quarters in unfinished basements and one lived at a tree farm where he worked. Since members of the ESL school I volunteered with often conducted committee meetings in my living room, it was natural to invite parents to my house. Indeed, some parents seemed most comfortable speaking about what they considered a private topic at my home. One mother, for example, met with me first in her living room where a number of relatives walked in and out during our conversation. The next week I invited her to coffee, and she disclosed many more details sitting at my

kitchen table. In three cases I interviewed fathers in public spaces, such as the local Dunkin Donuts.

Many mothers and fathers, I found, were initially reluctant to discuss their experiences as transnational parents. I often had a difficult time identifying parents for interviews, which surprised me given that I had met so many transnational parents before actively seeking interviews. My efforts to interview one young man whom I had known for years illustrate a typical parent's reluctance to talk about children in Mexico. When I first met this particular father, he shared an apartment with my t6hen boyfriend Raul and I clearly remember the Sunday he bought a fancy plastic picture frame and proudly displayed on the dresser a picture of his three-year-old daughter dressed up in a white frilly party dress. Four years later when I started formal interviews I sought him out and asked if we could talk about his daughter. These are excerpts from my field notes:

> I asked if it is okay to interview him tonight. He says, "Sure. It is useful to remember, they say that memories are what make a life." However, he seems uncomfortable. As an opener I ask if he knows other parents with children in Mexico. "Yes, I know this girl" he says, "She also has a son there [Mexico] and sometimes we talk and share things" . . . He says I should have told him over the phone, and he would have brought her along so I could talk to both of them tonight . . . Then he offers that he knows a number of people, and suggests that rather than talk to people individually, I talk to them in a group. "That way they feel more comfortable talking . . . sometimes you say, should I say this or not, but since you hear someone else say it, well then you feel that you too can tell it."

Understanding that he was uncomfortable talking to me about his separation from his daughter, we did not discuss it further that evening. I called him a couple of times afterwards to try to set up a group interview; each time he said he would stop by that evening and then never came. I never did the interview.

The other difficulty in interviewing migrant parents was that they were reluctant to refer me to others even though parents often mentioned their friends with children in Mexico during the interview. Snowball sampling did not work in the traditional sense, and I generally gained access to families one person at a time through people I knew without migrant children. The one exception was a young mother from the state of Puebla who had actually been reunited with her six-year-old son a year before. From my field notes:

> She says she knows a number of women, but seems reluctant when I ask if I can call her later to see if she can set something up. Instead, she refers me to her neighbor and shows me which house the neighbor lives in. She agrees to walk over with me. The bell doesn't work; it takes a while for someone to come to the door. The neighbor frowns while my hostess explains who I am. I get the sense that the neighbor is very uncomfortable and take over the explanation, but her face remains tight. The neighbor suggests I come another day, which would be better because they are fixing the living room, and gives me her phone number.

I wasn't hopeful about this particular interview and was surprised that later over the phone the neighbor agreed to talk to me and invited me over. During the interview, I learned that while the two women are from the same town, they are not friends. It seemed that the first mother I interviewed wasn't willing to refer me to her friends, so she gave me to an adversary instead.

I often found, however, that once parents agreed to an interview, they–especially fathers–seemed to enjoy disclosing their stories to me. For example, fathers were often fairly candid in revealing marital infidelities; I suspected this was in part due to the perception that women in the United States have liberal attitudes about sex (Malkin 2004). I also suspected that as a community outsider, I offered a sympathetic ear and telling me did not risk migrant parents' reputations with other Mexican families.

One of the most useful means for gaining Mexican parents' trust during interviews was my son Temo. Mexican mothers and I often shared the little anecdotes about our children that all mothers do, which made us both more comfortable during the interview. Mothers seemed particularly at ease when I shared snippets about my relationship with my son's father, since I too had lived with a Mexican man. But fathers also felt at ease with my son, who has a markedly Mexican name (Cuauhtémoc was the last emperor of the Aztecs) and only spoke Spanish at the time. They often played with him and offered him small toys as gifts, demonstrating a genuine affection for children I found to be common among most of the Mexican men I met (see also Gutmann 1996).

The sensitivity migrant parents' displayed in talking about their children in Mexico suggests that family separation may be touchy for a variety of reasons that may differ along gender lines. Both mothers and fathers seemed to view family matters as

private affairs. Many were sad about their separation and simply did not want to talk about it. Yet the mothers I met seemed to fear that they would be judged as being "bad" parents for having left their children. Moreover, interviews often brought up issues of personal failures, such as marital problems or alcohol and drug abuse. Fathers, especially, were reluctant to talk about children who they didn't provide for regularly financially. The mothers and fathers I did interview were thus quite remarkable for opening up about a very personal aspect of their lives. As I will discuss more thoroughly in Chapter 4, family separation for Mexican mothers and fathers, although common, is not considered desirable.

Exploring Children's Experiences

Between 2004 and 2005, I received a Fulbright grant to study the lives of children left behind by migrant parents and their caregivers. While I had been to Mexico before, this was the first time I was able to travel to the many places in Oaxaca and Puebla I heard immigrants in New Jersey reminisce about at parties and informal gatherings. For seven of the nine months I lived in Mexico, I was based in a small town of 2,084 residents in 2004 (Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social 2004). The town is located in the Lower Mixteca region of Oaxaca, about 1 ½ hours drive from the city of Huajuapan de Leon. Due to the size and nature of the community, I will call the town by a pseudonym, San Angel, to protect the identities of the residents.

I went to San Angel out of convenience; a family I knew from New Jersey offered me a room in their house whose second floor they only occupied half of the year. Living in the house, just a block from the municipal square, was ideal due to location and also because the downstairs housed a *caseta*, or public phone booth, where town residents

often came to wait for phone calls from the United States. I also chose the site because the lower Mixteca of Oaxaca is noted for being a region with high levels of U.S. migration (Smith 2001). An anthropological study in the Mixteca during the 1950's found that a number of men in the community had worked in the US as *braceros* (Romney and Romney 1966). I too found that a surprising number of old timers in town had been north as *braceros*. While I was in San Angel a local committee was aiding former *braceros* in reclaiming money owed to them. I helped translate documents, viewed pictures of these early migrants on cotton fields in Alabama, and heard stories of them harvesting cucumber and cherry crops in Minnesota.

In fact, in the early 1980s it was estimated that of every 10 Mixtecans, 3 permanently left the region, 4 were temporary migrants, and only 3 stayed in the area (Velasco Ortiz 1995). High out-migration rates have been attributed to poor land quality (Anguiano Tellez 1992). Thirty percent of land in the region was estimated, again in the 1980s, to have no practical use for human, vegetable or animal life (Velasco Ortiz 1995). It was during these years that migrants from the Mixteca of Puebla headed to New York City in unprecedented numbers (Cortes Sanchez 2003; Smith 2001). Research on Oaxacan migration describes waves of Mixtec migration to Oregon and California in the 1980s and 1990s, with most migrants working in U.S. agriculture as their fathers and grandfathers did in years past (Corbett 1992; Rivera-Salgado 1999; Stephen 2002).

The effects of long-standing U.S. migration in San Angel were visibly evident. Before arriving in the Mixteca, I had traveled in areas of rural Veracruz and was accustomed to seeing houses with aluminum roofs, makeshift walls, or dirt floors. In San Angel, 500 of 510 houses were made of cement in 2004; only 10 remained that were

made entirely of adobe, or mud bricks. Only 13 percent of dwellings had dirt floors and there were no houses in town with aluminum, cardboard, wood, or palm tree roofs (Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social 2004). The Mexican Social Security office does not keep statistics on motor vehicles, but notable were the number of cars, mostly trucks, in town. Quite a few had license plates from destinations as far as Washington, Oregon, and my home state of New Jersey.

In San Angel I used a snowball sample to locate children with parents in the United States. Initially, I found it difficult to identify families and children to interview. Although within a week of our arrival, whenever we were out, people would recognize us, or really my son, by calling out his name, "Temo", no one greeted me. I quickly learned that proper decorum meant saying *buenos dias*, *buenas tardes,* or *buenas noches* to everyone who passed. It took me a while to get the timing right, for the greeting actually should come from the person who passes, and not the one who is passed (and yes, it can be hard to tell at times). Rules of decorum are reserved for adult members of the community; children are either greeted affectionately by name as people often did with Temo or ignored. Young men defy the rules and don't greet anyone except with the occasional catcall. Actually, when my husband Raul visited in February, he said I was greeting people in the wrong way, because I often greeted after I had passed residents by a step or two. He explained that this could be taken as an offense, and I should look people in the eye with my *buenos dias* before going by. I learned my style from observation, so it is possible everyone had been slighting me for months without me noticing.

At that point, however, it didn't seem to matter, for it was mid January, a good three weeks before I finally felt I had been accepted as at least a temporary feature in the town. After I came back from a week-long trip to the city of Oaxaca over Christmas and New Year's, people suddenly started greeting me when I passed by asking, "*¿Ya se hallo usted aqui?* You got used to it here already?" It was a simple line to invite conversation, but to me it was symbolic, as if people realized I hadn't been scared away and was now worthy of some consideration.

I took this as a cue. After January, I actively sought interviews with children in San Angel and miraculously wrapped up my research in town at an amazing speed of 6 weeks time. At first I felt reluctant to "cold call" families, wanting to say so and so had sent me, as was a requisite in New Brunswick. But I soon learned this was unnecessary in a small town. I suspect that most expected I might approach them because they heard about me already, although they always patiently listened as I explained my research project. No one, in fact, questioned my motives. No one refused an interview. It was the easiest string of interviews I had ever done.

I ended up interviewing 45 children of U.S. migrants in San Angel. I also interviewed three adult children of U.S. migrants. Eleven children ranged in age from 5 to 7, 8 children from 8 to 10, 9 children from 11 to 13, 10 children from 14 to 16, and 9 children were over age 17. When interviewing younger children, I used a structured interview schedule. Younger children generally did not want me to record our interviews, but I was able to take almost exact notes of our conversations. In contrast, with older children I used a semi-structured interview schedule, and interviews with young adults resembled those I had done with migrant parents in being relatively open ended and

characterized by free flowing conversations. I tape recorded eight of these interviews and took detailed notes of our interactions.

Questions varied somewhat according to the age of the child and their comfort level. I asked children of all ages about why their parents migrated to the United States, what they knew of their parents' life abroad, if they wanted their parents to leave and if they wanted them to return, the frequency and content of phone contact and monetary remittances, how they got along with their substitute caregiver, and their own aspirations, educational and otherwise, for the future. The relatively equal distribution of interviews with children of all ages allowed for insight into the ways that children of different ages described parents' migration.

Access to children in San Angel was achieved vis-à-vis the adults in their lives. Many children agreed to talk to me because they were instructed to do so by their grandparents or mothers. I approached this project with the goal of including children's often-overlooked opinions in the study of migration. Thus at first I was uncomfortable using the power imbalance to my advantage, but soon found that if I wanted their guardian's permission for an interview (which was required), this was the only way to go about it. Moreover, when I started interviewing children, I was wary of many children's very curt and matter-of-fact style of interviews until I realized that even those who were anxious to be interviewed and tape-recorded spoke to me in that way. In retrospect, I think children's responses were the result of the mix between the local dialect and the ranchero culture (see Smith 2006). Moreover, children in San Angel did not appear to be taught to speak their mind, unlike children in middle class America (Lareau 2003). As a result, children (and even some adults) had a hard time articulating their thoughts and

emotions, particularly in the relatively formal setting of an interview with an adult. Sometimes children clammed up and said they didn't know the answer, saying "*no sé"* when a topic was emotional or something they didn't understand. Simple answers of yes or no were at times wrought with emotion. I began to pay more attention to, and take field notes on, children's actions and non-verbal cues as well as reports on their behavior from caregivers. Attention to how children act became an important analytical tool.

I was not the only one to interpret children's actions as much as their words. Migrant parents seemed to do the same, often basing their information on short conversations with children and more lengthy descriptions of children's attitudes and behaviors by caregivers in Mexico. This poses an interesting contradiction. On the one hand, children in San Angel are seen as the least "powerful" members of Mexican families; they are not taught to express themselves verbally. Yet when parents no longer live with children, children's opinions, feelings and emotions, often expressed non-verbally, become increasingly important for parents as they assess the relative success of their migration strategies. Chapter 6 explores this dynamic in detail.

The adults in children's lives proved important in more than one way. Interviews with children's caregivers in San Angel provided key insights into children's experiences while parents were away, particularly those of the younger children who were not terribly verbal in their interviews. In San Angel, I was able to interview 27 caregivers; most were grandmothers although I also spoke to some grandfathers, aunts, and mothers whose husbands lived in the United States. None of the interviews with caregivers were tape-recorded; all were open-ended informal conversations, which seemed to put the older residents in town most at ease. I frequently found that families in San Angel contained

multiple layers of parent-child separation. Children often lived with grandmothers whose husbands had worked in the United States at some point; as such these caregivers had also raised their own children as part of transnational families. Along with providing important observations about the children in their care, caregivers' experiences, as will be reviewed in Chapter 8, proved significant in their own right to shaping intergenerational relationships and the overall experiences of Mexican transnational families.

Changing Dynamics in Transnational Families

Interviews in New Jersey and San Angel provided me with two sides of the story, so to speak, but not two sides of the same story. In a smaller sample of families, I set out to speak with various members residing in both Mexico and New Jersey. Other researchers have found that this type of triangulation in research with families is particularly useful to verify self-reports of family interactions as well as to account for the ways individuals view similar events differently according to their position within the family (Hansen 2005; Laureu 2003). I identified constellations of migrant parents (either mother, father or both when possible), their children in Mexico and their children's caregiver. While I often spoke to neighbors, friends and other family members who seemed actively involved in these arrangements, my primary focus was the parent-child-caregiver constellation.

Selecting family constellations was complicated by geography; the Mexican community in New Brunswick is not tightly bound to any one place in Mexico, but rather to a number of towns and cities in the Mixteca and on the coast of Oaxaca and Guerrero, as well as Mexico City. In addition, family members in both sites had to be willing participants in the study. In the end, I identified 12 family constellations. I purposively

sought a sub-sample that represented the variations in transnational family type I had observed in interviews with migrant mothers and fathers in the United States. I included three families of father-only migrants, three families of single mother migrants, three families with married migrant couples, and three families in which both parents migrated but divorced once they were in the United States. I initially selected two families who had been reunited with some of their children in the United States (in one case the children were adults), to account for the changing impact of separation on families over time. As mentioned above, Appendix A provides a list of the members of these families.

In all but one case, I interviewed the parents first in the United States, meeting with 10 parents on multiple occasions. Then I visited children and caregivers while I was living in San Angel. Four of the families actually lived in San Angel. I resided with one of the families for the seven months I stayed in town. Two families lived in nearby cities of the Mixteca (approximately two and four hour trips from San Angel respectively). One family resided in the city of Puebla and three in the city of Acapulco. Two families lived in small coastal towns: one in Guerrero and one in Oaxaca. The diversity of the sub-sample enabled me to gauge the importance of factors specific to San Angel, like educational opportunity, to family dynamics of separation. In total, half of the sub-sample of families lived in the region of the Mixteca, and all but one of the others, in the region known as the "Costa Chica." Four families lived in major cities, two in small cities, two in large towns and four in the small town of San Angel. I traveled on public buses for the shorter trips and hired a taxi driver from San Angel to take me on two longer trips to visit the families furthest away. I almost always visited families with my son Temo. On occasion we traveled with a 17-year-old girl from my husband Raul's hometown in

Veracruz who helped me with child care. I often felt my Mexican companions, along with Temo, facilitated my initial interactions with the families, helping put us all at ease.

The geographic diversity meant that I spent different amounts of time with each family due to travel and time constraints. In San Angel, I observed families repeatedly on a daily basis, but interviewed each family member just once. However, we interacted frequently and often talked about migration informally, and I had the opportunity to observe how some children reacted to parents' phone calls, or their participation in school events, among other things. I visited two of the families living outside of San Angel on 4 different day trips. Each visit consisted of conversations directly related to my research; we discussed changes in the family or feelings about separation since my last visit and I interviewed different family members for their versions of the migration story. The other six families I visited during two to four overnight trips of varying durations. In most cases, the first visit was shorter than the second. I was able to observe daily routines in addition to engaging in specific conversations and interviews about family separation. Between visits I often made phone calls to the families, especially over the holiday season.

Access to the sample of 12 families was slightly different from both the fieldwork in the United States and in San Angel. In these 12 cases, Mexican hospitality prevailed. Because I was an invited guest, a friend of a relative in the United States, I was generally treated with great respect. In a few cases, I felt undeserving because I didn't know the migrant parents that well. However, by the time my stay in Mexico ended, ties with most families were cemented, giving me an even greater connection to migrant parents back in New Jersey. Caregivers often admitted after our initial meeting that they were concerned

I wouldn't speak Spanish when their U.S. relatives asked them to meet me. Once again, Spanish-speaking Temo was an amazing tool to bridge discomfort on family visits. He provided an unending topic of conversation and diversion; he played with the children of migrant parents and was the subject of constant attention from the adults.

Working with the 12 families presented a number of logistical challenges and opportunities, aside from the geographic ones already described. In one family, for example, the children joined their parents in the United States before I had the opportunity to interview them in Mexico, but I did interview them upon my return to the United States. One mother sent for both of her children shortly after my return to the US; another mother sent for her son, but not her daughter, also after I left Mexico. And, while in Mexico, two parents returned to Mexico for good to live with their children.

Ethnographic research with family constellations was emotionally intensive, as has been noted by other family scholars (Lareau 2003). This became more so over time as I got to know families better and had the chance to speak with multiple members of each family. In the end, I came to believe that many of the sad circumstances I describe in the following chapters were the unintended consequences of the actions of well meaning people.

Research with family constellations was also intense because it involved travel from one family environment to another (repeatedly to 12 different households). My travels helped me empathize with an important but under-theorized aspect of feeling "being here and there" simultaneously, often described by transnational scholars (Constable 1999; Fouron and Schiller 2001; Hondageu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). For my own part, as a mother I often felt displaced from home while in Mexico, even though I

was only there for a limited period and under drastically different circumstances than those I interviewed. I found that comforting moments were almost always in spaces connecting experiences in Mexico with those I had in New Jersey, for example watching a home video or viewing pictures migrant parents had sent from New Jersey. From my field notes on a visit to a family in Mexico:

> As on my previous visit, I instantly feel connected to the US in this house. The first time, it was the news channel from New York City which did it. Today it was the TV tuned to *Primer Impacto* – the sensationalist US Latino news brief program which I haven't seen since Jersey.

Unexpected were similar feelings upon my return to the United States. Although happy to be home, it took time to adjust to driving by strip malls instead of picturesque mountains. Although the streets, my friends and my house were the same, I was certainly different. Most of my migrant friends laughed when I described my experiences of dislocation, "Now you know, Joanna, how we feel." Life in the transnational circuit can be lonely because moving in and out of community life in two places–no matter how much you want to be in both places–is disorienting.

Anyone who has traveled may understand some of the feelings I describe. In fact, psychologists and educators describe "culture shock" as a normal process that travelers experience upon confronting a new culture; feelings of loneliness and disconnect are common in cultural adaptation (Nolan 1999; Pederson 1995). What is different in migrant communities is that so many others have taken the very same journey and attempt to

simultaneously exist here and there. Often on the transnational circuit one feels most at home in interactions with others who are also trying to bridge the gap, whether looking at pictures or watching U.S. news in Mexico or, in the United States, reminiscing of the *tamales* and *pozole* at Christmas time. These social ties may provide anchors for migrants moving back and forth between the United States and their home communities in Mexico. They may be very influential in family relationships during periods of separation, as will be further explored in Chapter 10.

The methodological approach of interviewing a select group of family constellations proved key in a number of ways. For one, it provided me with first hand insight into the multiple social worlds in which migrants operated. In addition, family constellations provided me with access to the perspectives of multiple family members contemporaneously. I was able to compare the accounts of different family members and achieve some level of internal validity regarding the salient themes in families. In most cases family members reports were consistent, but this was not always the case. Also, in-depth involvement with these families enabled me to explore more fully issues I found to be important in the larger samples of interviews in Mexico and New Jersey. Fieldwork and interviews with family constellation provided greater depth and insight into the ways family members manage their lives transnationally.

One of the most useful aspects of tracking transnational families over time was being able to observe how family configurations often changed. Mexican transnational families are not static; rather there is a fluid movement of people to and from the United States and even within the continental United States, despite the difficulties of the border crossing and migrants' undocumented status upon arrival. The fluidity of experiences of

separation is key to understanding the ways families' may ultimately resolve the tensions they experience during periods of separation over time.

Family and Community Contexts

Much of the data collected in this study focuses on family member's accounts of their experiences and derives from interviews. Yet this project also can be described as largely ethnographic. In New Brunswick and Mexico, I sought information on the broader family and community contexts that play a role in shaping family members' experiences with migration.

In New Jersey, as has previously been described, I conducted interviews in a community in which I had previously operated for over six years. As such, I spoke with many Mexican immigrants who did not have children in Mexico about the experiences of their own families. I met with the leaders of the local Mexican American Organization and discussed the topic of family separation with local Latino social workers and schoolteachers. The focus of this study is not these outside assessments, and thus the Latino community's reaction to family separation in the United States is not emphasized in this dissertation. Yet the overall consensus I repeatedly encountered was that leaving children behind is abnormal, reflects bad choices by migrant parents, and causes great problems for families. One Latina social worker I spoke with, for example, described children left behind as migrant parents' "dirty laundry." These community-wide opinions are important; they shed light on why migrant parents were reluctant to discuss their experiences. They are also indicative of the moral edge such decisions inevitably involve.

In Mexico, I undertook a more systematic exploration of the context in which children left behind operate. In San Angel, I spent time attending community events,

particularly extracurricular activities organized by the local schools. I taught English to children in the community with the support of one of the primary school teachers. I attended many parties during the holidays, including the *posadas,* the rodeos, weddings, and municipally organized town dances. Often I attended these events and other outings with members of the four family constellations who resided in San Angel.

In Mexico I also sought information about children's lives via the schools in which they spent many of their days. I visited 23 primary, middle and high schools in order to survey over 4,000 students about their family migration history and views of international migration. This included completed surveys with 162 middle school students and 105 fourth, fifth and six graders in San Angel. I mostly visited schools in the region surrounding San Angel, but I included surveys with students in six schools outside the region for comparative purposes. My primary goal was to identify how common parent-child separation was. Surveys also asked students about their opinions about the United States and their aspirations for the future.

On many of my visits to schools to conduct the surveys, at the request of many School Directors, I made presentations then or on subsequent dates about Mexican migration to the United States, particularly about the standard of living for Mexican immigrants. On a handful of occasions, I substituted for English teachers. As I visited some schools multiple times, I learned about local education politics and, specifically, how students view migration. I also interviewed 15 teachers, school directors and administrators such as social workers about their views of the effects of international migration on education.

One of the limitations of my work in schools surrounding San Angel was the age of survey participants; I learned a bit about older children's perspectives on migration but little from younger students. To remedy this, in January of 2006 I returned to Mexican schools, this time to the coastal region of Oaxaca and Guerrero. I visited three primary schools to conduct a picture project with students in the first through sixth grades. The goal of the project was to match the surveys I had done with older students, and I hoped to learn more about how young Mexican children imagine their families and life in the United States. Each student was asked with minimal instruction to first draw a picture of their family and then to draw a picture of how they imagined the United States. I collected pictures and family migration histories from 423 students. Of students who participated in the picture project, 94–or 22 percent–had one or both of their parents in the United States.

Surveys, and particularly young children's pictures, were designed to offer a distinct view into children's views of U.S. migration. They also provide the means for evaluating how children of migrant parents' experiences may converge or diverge from those of other children in their respective communities. Although I did not conduct in depth fieldwork with non-migrant families in Mexico, the surveys and pictures provide a means for comparing the perspectives of these children with those living in transnational families. Additionally, fieldwork in San Angel and at area schools sheds light on the community context in which children of migrants live. Throughout the dissertation I strive to highlight the ways experiences within Mexican transnational families are shaped by the overall context of Mexican migration, whether for children and caregivers living in communities with high levels of U.S. migration or migrant parents in the United States.

Chapter 2

AL NORTE

Today women, along with men, are increasingly on the move in Mexican transnational families. How can we understand the increasing migration of mothers? While transnational mothering in Mexico echoes migration trends around the globe, in this chapter I suggest that it has distinct features, arising out of a long-standing tradition of Mexican migration to the United States and the expectations of economic mobility via migration rooted in this tradition. Moreover, while culturally based ideals about the Mexican family, particularly as related to gender, generation, and extended kinship ties, may have supported migration patterns in the past, there are reasons to suspect that new patterns in migration, with women leaving children behind, may be at odds with the values typically ascribed to the Mexican family. In what follows I explore the expectations embedded in Mexican migration strategies as they have been constructed both historically and culturally. I consider the interplay between a "master narrative" of Mexican migration and what Schneider (1968) has called the "cultural constructs" of the Mexican family.

GLOBAL PATTERNS IN TRANSNATIONAL MOTHERING

When Mexican mothers move to the United States, they are joining a worldwide movement of men, women and families, not from densely populated areas to frontiers, as typical before the mid twentieth century, but rather from developing countries to highly industrialized nations (Massey et al. 1998). Transnational families now span the globe

(Bryceson and Vuorela 2002) and are most common among families moving from less wealthy to more prosperous nations. When the most economically productive members of the family–men and women in the prime of their lives–move to areas of concentrated capital, and children and elderly remain in areas with few resources, inequalities between wealthy and poor nations may be reproduced, reinforced and accentuated in individual households.

Moreover, when women leave children to join their husbands or other family members in the United States, they join the many mothers around the world who leave their children in the care of others. Like middle-class working women in the United States who entrust the care of their children to nannies or child care centers, they are breaking away from a family model in which mothers are primarily responsible for the care of children. Yet transnational mothers differ because by undertaking physical separation from their children for months and years at a time, as opposed to several hours in a workday, they cannot make up for lost time in the evenings and weekends. The stakes are higher for these transnational mothers. They are "actively, if not voluntarily, building alternative constructions of motherhood . . . On the cusp of the millennium, transnational mothers and their families are blazing new terrain, spanning national borders, and improvising strategies for mothering" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997:549). As such, the international movement of mothers in the twenty-first century simultaneously replicates global disparities of wealth and challenges gender roles within families. This new migration strategy has important implications for relationships in migrants' households.

Far from outspoken feminists, transnational mothers rarely seem to be defiant in their choice to leave children when they migrate. Rather scholars describe the separation of mothers and children as a difficult if almost a forced choice, and a further symptom of the pervasiveness of the stark inequalities of the modern world. Much of the current scholarship on migrating mothers highlights the socio-political factors that push and pull mothers into international migration streams.

Economic factors have been crucial in mothers' increased migration. Research suggests that the rapid expansion of the service sectors in many "global cities" has created a great demand for female labor (Sassen 2001). The current organization of the global economy has increased job opportunities for women in places of concentrated capital, and, much like during early periods of industrialization, women–including mothers–are joining the paid labor force in unprecedented numbers (George 2005; Hutchinson 1985; Kessler-Harris 1981; Tilly and Scott 1978). As jobs are located in global cities, rather than national urban centers, women cross international borders to work.

Another feature of the global economy at the start of the twenty first century has been economic crisis in many developing countries, where social costs have been exacerbated by macro-economic policies aimed to jump start stagnant economies. Most notable are structural adjustment policies, which have directed national resources towards foreign debt payment at the expense of social welfare programs. These strategies for national development have proven particularly harmful for women who, whether single mothers or wives, often depend on social services to supplement the family income. In Peru, for example, women often turn to social service organizations when husbands'

salaries are insufficient or when they have little access to their husbands' incomes. Women have been the most adversely affected by structural adjustment programs as previous sources of assistance are no longer available (Pitkin and Bedoya 1997).

While the growth of service sector jobs in "global cities" and the negative effects of structural adjustment policies and free trade on developing economies help explain the push and pull factors involved in female migration, they do not explain why many mothers decide to migrate alone, and not with their children, as was common in domestic migration streams during early industrialization. Today advances in communication and technology enable women to travel longer distances to work for higher wages than are available locally or even within national boundaries. Technology also transforms relationships within migrant families. There is room for debate over how letters sent home by Polish migrants early in the twentieth century compare with the weekly phone calls of Mexican migrants as vehicles for maintaining parent-child relationships. I agree, however, with transnational scholars who suggest that new technologies make it "possible for the first time for immigrants to operate more or less simultaneously in a variety of places" (Foner 2000:176).

The immediacy of communication is a crucial factor for migrant parents. Parents can wire money via services like Western Union in response to minor crises, such as children's illnesses, a far cry from the four weeks or more it may have taken to send remittances to Italy in the 1920s (Foner 2000:171). In addition, despite practical difficulties, most Mexican parents can arrive home by air after a day of travel, and some do when their parents or children become seriously ill. New technologies foster parents' ability to respond to family emergencies even from abroad. Satellite technology also

makes communication possible with families living in even the most remote spots (without phone lines) through cellular phones (Mahler 1999). The frequency of phone conversations and length of time a parent can talk to his or her children over the phone may have implications for the quality of parent-child relationships from a distance. As I describe in Chapter 4, many parents continue to play disciplinary roles with their children, monitor their homework and school progress, and provide orientation and advice to children over the phone. In short, new possibilities for parent-child relationships in transnational family life are facilitated by new technologies.

Aside from advances in technology and communication, the bureaucratization of immigration laws and legislation around the globe shapes families' migration decisions and often lead mothers to leave their children behind. At times mothers are only able to legally migrate to host countries under specific visa provisions or guest worker programs that exclude migration of children or other family members. This is common for Filipinas who migrate via the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (Tyner 1999). Host country immigration policies are also a factor; domestic workers in Canada, for example, cannot sponsor the migration of family members until they achieve landed migration status, generally a number of years after first arrival (Cohen 2000). One hundred years ago, movement across the borders of newly emerged nation-states involved fewer restrictions and lower levels of enforcement.

Finally, the jobs women take when they migrate internationally often make it impossible for women to live with their own children. This is particularly true for domestic workers, one of the common occupations for transnational mothers, who live with employers' families (see Constable 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Lan 2003;

Salazar-Parreñas 2001). Also, the concentration of capital in "global cities" translates into high costs of living there. In most industrialized nations, dual-wage earning families are on the rise. In 2005, 65 percent of married couples in the United States with children under age 18 had both husband and wife in the labor force, up from 59 percent in 1986 (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). Even when a wage-earning spouse is present, the low-wage jobs that immigrant women find rarely pay enough to support entire families. International migration may only be advantageous for individuals who can stretch the purchasing power of their earnings by sending any surplus to a place where the costs of living are much lower.

We might suspect that Mexican transnational mothers share characteristics with mothers migrating from other parts of the globe. Mexican women often find jobs in the expanding service sector of the United States (Chang 2000). Economic crisis hit Mexico in the 1980s and evidence suggests that structural adjustment policies in Mexico have been especially punitive for the female labor force. For example, Alarcon-Gonzalez and McKinley (1999) show that changes in relative wages resulting from Mexican structural adjustment policies in the late 1980s and early 1990s more adversely affected women income-earners than their male counterparts, particularly those living in rural areas. Also, advances in communication technologies and legal barriers to family immigration may make Mexican women more willing to consider leaving their children behind.

Yet Mexican migration to the United States has a number of distinct features. At one time, most of the western and southwestern United States was Mexico. Today Mexicans immigrants constitute 30 percent of the entire foreign-born population in the United States, by far the largest immigrant group. Recent estimates suggest that 1 in 10 of

the entire Mexican population currently lives in the United States (Passel 2004). Unlike in many other parts of the world, there has been no significant U.S. military presence in Mexico and the resulting marriages between Mexican women and U.S. soldiers to spark female migration[8]. Neither has there been a campaign by the Mexican or the U.S. government to support the international migration of women. On the contrary, domestic policy which favors free-trade can be described as prompting domestic migration, in lieu of international migration, by providing jobs for women in *maquiladoras* and other export-oriented businesses in the north of the country (Davila and Saenz 1990). Evidence suggests that when women migrate internally, they usually take their children with them (Lomnitz 1977; Mendez Morales 2000). Moreover, government-supported campaigns that directly facilitated Mexican migration to the United States have encouraged the unilateral migration of men, not women.

The rise of Mexican mothers who migrate without their children has its roots in the history of Mexican migration to the United States, which in some ways parallels global patterns of migration, but in other ways is unique. I now turn to a description of Mexican migration patterns over the past century to explain why split-family migration has become such a common strategy in Mexican labor migration to the United States.

PATTERNS OF MEXICAN MIGRATION YESTERDAY AND TODAY

The history of Mexican family migration to the can be divided into four distinct periods: (1) early waves of family migration (prior to 1942), (2) the Bracero years (1942-

[8] Increases in female migration to the US from many Asian countries, including the Philippines, is often attributed to US military presence in these countries.

1964), (3) rising community out-migration (1965-1980), and (4) the more recent expansion of Mexican migration (1980 to the present). A description of migration during each of these periods shows how, over time, male dominated patterns have evolved and–even as the demographics of Mexican migration have changed in recent years–have created a legacy of family separation as a means to economic mobility.

Early Waves of Family Migration

Mexican migration to the United States has been acknowledged since not long after the end of the Mexican American War in 1848. However it was at the turn of the twentieth century that changes in both Mexico and the United States spurred the first waves of Mexican migration in response to national development in both countries. Between 1876 and 1911 Mexicans lived under the autocratic rule of Porfirio Diaz. During this period, or the *Porfiriato*, the interests of Mexican elites, which had been fragmented by on-going disputes at the local and regional levels, were unified for the first time at the national level. Most significantly, ruling elites were united in their approach to land issues, and the resulting polarization with Mexican peasantry is what ultimately led to the Mexican Revolution of 1911 and the fall of the *Porfiriato*.

> During the Porfirian era, the ancient system of land tenure was destroyed and virtually all land was brought under the private control of hacienda owners. Mexican peasants were displaced from their lands in massive numbers, and by 1910, 97 percent of rural families were landless. One-seventh of the entire country was owned by 29 individuals and companies (Massey et al. 1987:39).

Yet the *Porfiriato* was also a period of increased industrialization, including a mass expansion of Mexican railways. While in 1875 there were 663 kilometers of railways, by the end of the *Porfiriato* in 1920, there were more than 19,748 kilometers of Mexican railways (Sanchez 1993:21). Significantly, the Mexican railroads spanned the states of Western Mexico including San Luis Potosi, Aguascalientes, and Guadalajara. They also connected to U.S. railways at Tucson, El Paso and San Antonio.

Meanwhile the United States was experiencing labor shortages in its own expansion to the Southwest, most specifically in mining and agriculture, but also in the building of railways. With no jobs at home and the means to arrive to available jobs in the United States, Mexican landless peasantry moved north. By 1910 approximately 18,000 Mexicans per year came to work in *el norte* (Massey et al. 1987:42). Prior to 1917 United States law did not allow for temporary foreign workers and even explicitly denied admission to those with specific labor contracts; but in 1917 the U.S. government officially approved the recruitment of Mexican workers. Sources estimate that between 1917 and 1921, some 50,000 to 80,000 Mexicans came to work in the agricultural fields of California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah and Texas (Martin 1998:877).

With the upheaval of the Mexican Revolution (1913-1920), many Mexicans were eager to move, particularly from the western and central states of Nuevo Leon, Tamualipas, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosi, Guanajuato, Jalisco and Michoacan where most of the fighting between the northern rebels led by Pancho Villa and the Central government took place (Martin 1998:879). And, with the encouragement of U.S. employers, entire families moved north.

> Growers found that they could put women and children to work at lower wages and that when accompanied by their families, men more willingly endured harsh working conditions . . . in the 1920s family immigration made up a larger portion of Mexican immigration than it had in prior decades. (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:21-22)

By the 1930s, many Mexican families lived in the southwestern states of the United States, but with the economic crisis and shortage of jobs of the Great Depression, racism and xenophobia ensued. Just as they had come, over the next decade, entire families would be sent back to Mexico; undocumented, legal residents, and U.S. citizens were rounded up during deportation campaigns (Sanchez 1993). By 1940, the Mexican American population was just half what it had been only 10 years earlier (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

The Bracero Years

It didn't take long for the tides to change. Yet this time, the composition of Mexican migration would be markedly different. When the United States entered World War II in 1941, sudden labor shortages at home arose (Martin 1998). Meanwhile in Mexico, during the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution in the 1930s agrarian reforms were implemented under the leadership of President Lazaro Cardenas. Land grants were given to peasants to redistribute what had once been under the control of the large hacienda owners. Although moderately successful, once Cardenas was out of office in 1940, reforms were scaled back considerably and the federal government began supporting agricultural production for exports by large firms (Massey et al. 1987). Once

again, rural Mexicans' access to land was undermined by state interests; small land-owners were moved to areas of inferior productivity and a number of laws favored large agriculturalists who, it was believed, would modernize agriculture in the interest of national development.

In 1942, Mexico and the US signed a temporary worker arrangement, which aimed to alleviate both the United States's need for workers and the Mexican peasantry's need for work. By the end of the program in 1964, over 4.5 million Mexicans had worked in the United States on temporary work visas generally of three to six month duration (Massey et al. 1987:43). *Bracero* contracts were available to Mexicans from many destinations, including the southern state of Oaxaca (Cohen 2004). However, like earlier migration patterns that were concentrated along railroad lines running through Western Mexico, between 1951 and 1962 45 percent of *braceros* left the Western states of Jalisco, Michoacan, Guanajuato and Zacatecas (Massey et al. 1987). Morever, almost all contracts went to men. The Bracero program had no provisions for family migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). In the United States, *braceros* lived in primarily male migrant labor camps; isolated where they lived and worked, Mexican migrants were rarely integrated into the broader U.S. society. Migration fluctuated according to the growing season; Mexican migrants were primarily "birds of passage" (Piore 1979)

Most significantly, the Bracero period consolidated a regionally specific, male-led, seasonal migration pattern among Mexican families. "The earliest emigrants from a community were almost always males of working age, usually married family heads from some identifiable niche in the socioeconomic structure" (Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994:1492). Migrant pioneers in most towns during this period were primarily

respectable male heads of households; U.S. migration became symbolic as an honorable strategy for economic success for male breadwinners. As such, the Bracero period was crucial to fueling what would become an entrenched pattern of family separation, in which men migrated without their women and children, most particularly in communities of western Mexico.

Rising Community Out-migration

The Bracero program aimed to regulate the migration of Mexican workers to fulfill labor shortages in the United States temporarily. However there were a number of problems in the administration of the program. After the first year of the program, U.S. employers managed work contracts, which resulted in exploitative conditions for Mexican workers. In addition, officials in Mexico reportedly sold Bracero contracts to the highest bidders (Cohen 2004). To avoid these abuses, during the Bracero period many Mexicans migrated illegally (Martin 1998). Once the program officially ended in 1964, undocumented migration of Mexicans continued. For the next 20 years, Mexican migration mushroomed as many former *braceros* and others took advantage of relatively liberal U.S. immigration laws to gain legal residency, either prior to migration or after already having crossed the border illegally. Jobs in the United States proliferated in industries such as agriculture, where employers had become accustomed to the Mexican migrant labor force. In addition, new labor sectors, including construction, services and light-industry began to look towards the employment of Mexican workers by the beginning of the 1980s (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:27).

"Between 1960 and 1980 1.1 million undocumented migrants and an equal number of documented migrants entered the United States from Mexico" (Massey et al.

1987:44). Men continued to be the primary movers, with women and children making up a smaller, but increasingly significant portion of migratory streams. Rather than being confined to agricultural labor camps, as during the Bracero period, Mexican immigrants now settled in urban-based communities concentrated in California, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona with 68 percent living in California in 1980 (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:24). Women and children were a small proportion of migrants, but quite important to the expansion of "little Mexicos" throughout the southwest, which became the entry points for new generations of Mexican migrants.

In Mexico, the impetus for international migration during this period was similar to that of earlier eras and was tied to the use of land in rural areas. During the 1960s, the government undertook a development model based on modernization and the bolstering of national economic independence (Eckstein 1977). At the local level, this meant more national support and technological resources for large producers who increasingly moved into cash crops for exports like sorghum and alfalfa. Yet families still depended on the labor-intensive cultivation of staple crops, such as corn, for their own consumption. In order to make ends meet, they often deployed one or more family members as day laborers to work for larger landowners. These wages helped supplement family income and allowed families to invest most resources into production for consumption. However, with technological advances, local large landowners depended more on machinery than human labor to cultivate crops (Massey et al. 1987). As U.S. migration had been a proven labor strategy for years, Mexican families continued to rely on seasonal and temporary work in *el norte* to supplement family income.

During this period, network ties increasingly facilitated continued out-migration.

> The act of migration not only induces changes within individual migrants that make further movement more likely, it also initiates changes in social structures that spread migration through the community . . . once the number of network connections reaches a critical threshold, migration becomes self-perpetuating because each act of movement creates the social structure necessary to sustain it. (Massey et al. 1994:1499-1500)

Between 1964 and 1980, social network migration was fortified. Changes in Mexican migration in both the United States, where urban Mexican settlement communities mushroomed, and in Mexico, where seasonal migration patterns were further solidified, were necessary precursors to the "critical threshold" of migration that many Mexican communities would experience in the ensuing decades.

Expansion of Mexican Migration

Over the next 25 years, U.S. migration became a way of life for many Mexican families, particularly those living in western states where earlier seasonal migration patterns had been concentrated. Moreover, significant changes in the U.S. and Mexican political economies during this same period led to distinctly new patterns in Mexican migration at the turn of the twenty-first century. I describe this period as a proliferation of Mexican migration, evident both in Mexican sending communities and in the destinations of Mexican populations in the United States.

In the 1970s, Mexico discovered large natural oil reserves, which slowly replaced agricultural exports as the cornerstone of national development efforts throughout the decade. When oil prices plummeted in the early 1980s, Mexico was hit hard and

defaulted on payments of its external debt in 1982. Austerity policies followed. Backed by the U.S. government, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the peso was devalued and exports were prioritized, among other structural adjustment policies (Schaeffer 1997). Perhaps more importantly, the 1980s debt crisis marked a change in Mexico's strategy to promote economic growth. By the 1990s, Mexican politicians moved away from protectionist politics aimed to bolster the national sovereignty and, under the influence of international pressures, looked towards models of economic liberalization. For example, in 1994, Mexico signed the North American Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Canada. And, the government's role in the national economy was cut back considerably (Cordera Campos and Gonzalez Tiburcio 1991). Privatization of important areas of the economy ensued, including the airlines, railroads and banks (Schaeffer 1997). Mexico's efforts to compete in the global economy initially appeared to pay off; investors flocked to Mexico and foreign direct investment increased from $750 million in 1982 to $8 billion in 1994 (Eckstein 2000:176).

Yet national economic reform was only partially successful. Certainly, there were notable improvements, but austerity programs were also instituted. The social costs of the debt crisis were huge. By 1988 the minimum wage was worth just half of its value in 1981 (Cordera Campos and Gonzalez Tiburcio 1991). The Mexican middle and lower-middle classes were hit hardest (Escobar Latapi and Roberts 1991). "The real incomes of average workers fell 40 percent between 1981 and 1988, while the incomes of government employees fell even more, nearly 50 percent" (Schaeffer 1997:99). Another peso crisis in 1994-1995 adversely affected those already hurt by the 1980s structural adjustment programs. Ninety percent of the population experienced a precipitous drop in

living standards in the 1990s (Eckstein 2000:176). New economic policies were particularly deleterious among urban dwellers. As a result, by the mid 1990s, United States migration streams encompassed a wider range of Mexicans than ever before with a significant proportion leaving Mexico City (Cornelius 1991). While in years past most Mexican migrants left rural areas due to pressures over land and agricultural production, now urban residents–including professionals and para-professionals as well as industrial workers–began to use the U.S. migration escape hatch (Cornelius 1991; Escobar Latapi and Gonzalez de la Rocha 1995).

Moreover economic liberalization in Mexico led to uneven economic growth.

> States responded differently to changing domestic market conditions: entire economic sectors have ground to a halt even as others – with connection to the external sector – thrived as never before. Areas with access to dollars from exports, the maquiladora industry, tourism or migrants working abroad have been transformed into oases of prosperity in the middle of generalized economic stagnation. (Cordera Campos and Gonzalez Tiburcio 1991:38)

In the 1980s and into the 1990s already poor states located in south central Mexico including Oaxaca, Puebla and Guerrero were hit particularly hard by changes in national economic policies. Residents of the state of Puebla, for example, experienced massive job losses and severe decreases in their standard of living throughout the 1980s (Smith 2001). What residents could do, and did do, was increase their access to dollars through U.S. migration. As a result, scholars noted a spread of U.S. migration throughout

the region. For example, in Puebla, U.S. migration was once regionally specific to the Mixteca; by the early twenty-first century it included communities from southeastern and northeastern areas of the state and the state capital (Cortes Sanchez 2003). Not only did the socio-economic status of migrants to the U.S diversify as a result of changes in the Mexican economy during the 1980s and 1990s, but U.S. migration increasingly became a family migration strategy in more and more communities throughout Mexico, including urban and rural dwellers and those from non-traditional sending states in the southern region of the country.

Concurrently, and partly in response to economic crisis in Mexico, U.S. immigration policy was reformed in 1986. The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) offered amnesty to many who had already been working in the United States illegally, and also implemented employer sanctions for those hiring undocumented immigrants in efforts to control unauthorized migration. Most significant for Mexican migrant families were the amnesty provisions; once a Mexican worker in the United States became a legal permanent resident he or she could sponsor the migration of close family members. Given the preponderance of male led migration in the past, it was assumed that IRCA would result in significant levels of family reunification among Mexicans. Although Donato (1993) did find an increase in female migration as a direct result of the IRCA amnesty, the rise in female migration in the 1980s and 1990s cannot be attributed solely to family reunification. In fact, an unintended consequence of the amnesty was a continued increase in undocumented migration of Mexicans (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). Not only were men of all socio-economic backgrounds from all areas migrating from Mexico as never before, but so too were their wives and

children, as well as unmarried or divorced and widowed women (Cornelius 1991; Donato 1993; Kanaiaupuni 2000).

In 1996, the United States implemented the Illegal Immigration and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IRAIRA), with the theme of reforms being evident in the title of the act. New policies differentiated between the undocumented who crossed the border without inspection and those who overstayed visas, and were considerably more punitive towards the former group[9]. Restrictive measures not only targeted Mexican workers, but increasingly their family members, as social benefits for immigrants were severely curtained in conjunction with the Welfare Reform of the same year (Chang 2000). Provisions were put in place so that Legal Permanent Residents could be deported if they committed criminal offenses of a moral nature (i.e. certain drug offenses, homicides, child abuse, etc.). Moreover, during the 1990s, border enforcement was also heightened and, more importantly, concentrated in areas considered to be the "main gates" of illegal entry. Operation Hold-the-Line in 1993, Operation Gatekeeper in 1994, Operation Safeguard in 1994 (but significantly expanded in 1999) and Operation Rio Grande in 1999 attempted to deter crossings in areas around El Paso, San Diego, Arizona and the Rio Grande Valley in Texas respectively (Cornelius 2001).

The U.S. crackdown on unauthorized migration in the 1990s has had a number of unanticipated consequences. First, it has not successfully deterred undocumented migration. The unauthorized in 2004 accounted for 29 percent of all immigrants in the United States; 57 percent of the unauthorized were Mexican, with 65 percent having

[9] Immigrants who overstayed visas could regularize their status via marriage or employment sponsorship, whereas those who crossed the border illegally were subject to a three or ten year bar to regularizing their status depending on the amount of time they had lived in the United States illegally. Moreover, those who crossed the border more than once after a cutoff date were subject to a permanent bar to legal admission.

arrived in the United States after 1995. In addition, since 1995 the average annual arrivals of the unauthorized have surpassed annual legal arrivals (Passel 2005). Second, the border crossing has become more dangerous as those seeking to cross must do so in more remote areas where border enforcement is not as concentrated. Increased danger is evident in statistics on border deaths. In California, there was a 509 percent increase in deaths among unauthorized border-crossers between 1994 and 2000. In Arizona during this same period, mortality among unauthorized crossers rose by 1,186 percent (Cornelius 2001). Third, the costs associated with undocumented migration have increased over the past ten years. *Coyotes* or *polleros*, those who help unauthorized cross the border, charged under $500 before 1995, but by mid-2001 they charged $1,200 - $1,500 (Cornelius 2001). Fourth there has been an increased tendency towards settlement among Mexican migrants living in the United States. Massey and his collaborators have found that "the likelihood that an undocumented migrant will return to Mexico within a year of entry has fallen from about 45 percent in the early 1980s to around 25 percent" (Massey 2006:B11). During a time of increased militarization of the U.S.-Mexican border, rates of return migration among Mexicans are dropping.

Finally, partly owing to the growth of the service sector outside of the traditional gateway areas of immigration in the United States (and perhaps also Mexicans reluctance to return to Mexico), there has been an unprecedented expansion of Mexican settlement to new destinations throughout the continental United States (Zuñiga and Hernandez 2005). Mexican communities have mushroomed in sites outside of the southwest including Georgia, Louisiana and the Carolinas in the South; New York City, Pennsylvania and New Jersey in the northeast; Iowa, Nebraska, Colorado and Nevada in

the mid-west and Oregon and Washington in the north-west (Durand, Massey, and Capoterro 2005). Unlike during the Bracero period where mostly male workers lived isolated from local communities in farm labor camps, Mexican migrant communities today are composed of men, women and children who mostly live in cities or towns where they generally work in restaurants, construction, domestic work and landscaping (Hirsch 2003; Zuñiga and Hernandez 2005). Children go to public schools where bilingual classes are rapidly expanding. Families attend churches that now offer mass in Spanish. Social service providers have increased needs for Spanish-speaking workers. In some communities, racial tensions are also on the rise (Dunn, Aragones, and Shivers 2005; Grey and Woodrich 2005; Shutika 2005).

Summary

Over the years, the composition of labor migrants from Mexico to the United States has changed. During the early twentieth century, many families sought work in the United States together. Yet after the repatriation during the Great Depression, split-family migration patterns have dominated, specifically with men leaving their wives and children seasonally on *bracero* labor contracts. More recently, Mexican immigrants to the United States have become increasingly diverse. Today they come from a wide variety of sending regions in Mexico representing a great diversity in customs, cultural traditions and, in some cases, languages[10]. Some migrants are well-educated; others can barely read and write in Spanish. Many migrants have always lived in cities while others left families in rural communities. Due to legal difficulties, many are not returning to Mexico as often as in the past. Not only do men migrate, but now so too do women and children of different age groups.

[10] Mexico is home to 62 indigenous languages. As migration spread throughout Mexico, indigenous people increasingly joined migrant streams. See, for example, Rivero Salgado 1999 and Stephen 2002.

Despite these changing demographics, there is continuity in the relationship between economic development, labor and U.S. migration. Cohen (2004) suggests that popular folk songs characterize the sentiments of economic responsibility associated with international migration for those he studied from Oaxaca. For example, in lyrics from *Llegan los Norteños,* "The *norteños* arrive, chewing up English, they return to the fiesta, they return home. The fiesta is over and the battle continues, looking for dollars, they leave again" (cited in Cohen 2004:1-2). While the individual aspirations of migrants may vary, a historical reliance on labor migration to the United States has resulted in a strong sense of migration as a primary means for supporting families.

Indeed, I would suggest that the historical predominance of U.S. migration as an economic escape hatch has led to a "master narrative" of economic opportunity and potential mobility via migration. According to Hertz (2001), "[Master Narratives] are taken for granted stories that individuals have internalized and use as a measure of their own life experience, but they are also solidified through the views of others who further provide social meaning" (p. 544). Inherent in what I will call the migration narrative in the remainder of the dissertation, is the expectation of some degree of economic gain for the family via U.S. migration (see also Griffin 1995). This migration narrative has helped shape family relationships as well as labor strategies.

THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FAMILY MIGRATION

> One essential problem, then, is to chart the relationship between the actual states of affairs and the cultural constructs so that we can discover how the cultural

> constructs are generated, the laws governing their change, and in just what ways they are systematically related to the actual states of affairs of life. (Schneider 1968:7)

Anthropologist David M. Schneider suggests that in the study of American kinship, the symbolic definitions, or cultural constructs, of family are extremely important to delineate. Although these "cultural constructs" of family are a product of social relationships, because they shape the expectations family members have of each other, cultural constructs of family also may shape "the actual state of affairs" of family relationships. The potential consequences of Mexican families' decisions to endure separation and migrate to the U.S to achieve economic mobility, are linked to the cultural constructs of Mexican kinship.

First and foremost, the Mexican family has been described as emphasizing family bonds–both nuclear and extended–over individual needs, a trait that is described as familism. Indeed, because familism tends to be assumed to be a dominat pattern, little research actually addresses how familism is enacted in Mexican families.

> The family has been such an important reality in Mexican society that the need for studying it has simply been taken for granted and seldom acted upon. This implicit 'empirical fact' and prominence of the family gave it unquestionable efficacy to solve its own problems without the need for intervention by scientific professionals. (Esteinou 2004:8)

More often than not, relationships in Mexican families have been reified, rather than problematized, so that studies of care of the elderly, for example, assume that children feel responsible for their elderly parents and will take care of them in old age rather than critically examine the nature of these caregiving relationships (Varley and Blasco 2000).

In contrast, much research has sought to uncover how familism is expressed among Mexican Americans especially in contrast to white, non-Hispanic native born Americans (see Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 1995; Tienda 1980). Raley, Durden and Wildsmith (2004), for example, suggest that the cultural tendency towards familism among Mexican Americans is evident in three broad areas of empirical findings: more dense extended kinship ties than among non-Hispanic whites, relatively high fertility rates that reflect a pro-natal attitudes, and marriage at earlier ages showing a propensity towards traditional gender roles. In what follows, I discuss each of these cultural constructs embedded in familism: (1) gender roles, (2) pro-natal attitudes, and (3) kinship ties in how they might shape intergenerational relationships.

Gender Roles in Parenting

In general social science research on mothering, ranging from studies of the social construction of motherhood to those emphasizing identity-work, shows it to be an activity primarily associated with the direct care of children (Collins 1994; Nakano Glenn 1994; Rothman 2001). Fatherhood, in contrast, most often entails providing children with economic, educational or career opportunities (Marsiglio et al. 2000; Thompson and Walker 1989). Yet scholarship also shows that mothers and fathers in different social, historical and cultural contexts may vary the ways they care and provide. Middle class fathers in nineteenth century America, for example, were often involved in providing

moral guidance for their children especially in regard to career choices (Johansen 2001). Today lower class mothers in the United States, particularly those on welfare, may choose not to work so they can care for their children (Edin and Lein 1997, Hays 2003). On the contrary, professional mothers may make significant contributions to family income and spend a majority of their time at their places of employment. They often, however, feel caught in a "time bind" between commitments at work and to children at home (Hochschild 1997). Despite variations in how parents enact their roles, there is a remarkable salience of the ideal of mothers as caregivers and fathers as providers.

In Mexico, mothering is mostly associated with the daily care of children and fathering with the securing of economic resources for the family (Gutmann 1996; Lewis 1959). Mexican mothers' caregiving role is especially celebrated and linked to the self-sacrificing characteristics of the Virgin of Guadalupe–likened to the Virgin Mary–who is worshipped devoutly throughout Mexico by individuals of remarkably diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Latin American scholars describe this culturally specific version of maternity as *marianismo*. According to this ideal, a woman should be self-negating and a martyr for her children because she is spiritually and morally superior to men (Melhuus 1996; Stevens 1973). In this context, the extent to which a Mexican woman fulfills, or fails to fulfill, her role as mother is, in part, a mark of her femininity.

In contrast, Mexican masculinity is generally linked to honor and power. Mexican culture is famous for "machismo." Whether looking at the role of men in the family, community or the state, most research on gender in Mexico employs, or contests, popular notions of the Mexican "macho" and its origin (see Gutmann 1996; Melhuus and Stolen 1996; Paz 1981; Paredes 1967; Prieur 1996). The Mexican macho is expected to

be, like Cuauhtémoc, the last emperor of the Aztecs who was tortured to death when he wouldn't reveal to the Spanish where treasures were hidden, stoic when challenged (Paz 1981; Melhuus 1996). Despite the personal suffering he may endure, as long as he never gives up, the Mexican male maintains power over his foes. As such, Mexican fathers' role in the family is also associated with honor.

According to Melhuus (1996), Mexican gender ideology bears a unique double standard. While men are considered more or less masculine compared to each other, women are judged in terms of morality. "[This is] the enigma of Mexican mestizo gender imagery: a male-dominant society which nevertheless places its highest value on the feminine, indicating a split between power and value" (Melhuus 1996:230). As such, there is a great degree of social value placed on women's roles as mothers. Mexican children respect mothers above all else; they are the emotional heart of the family. Fathers' roles are less idealized. However, if mothers are models of morality, a father's duty is to show children how to act honorably in the face of adversity.

Child Centered Families

While the ideological roles of mothers and fathers are segregated between caring and providing for children, Mexican men and women's parenting experiences converge in the primacy of children in Mexican families. "Finding pleasure in the company of children is considered by people of all generations in Mexico, even childless adults, to be one of the most natural and wonderful things in the world" (Gutmann 1996:70). Although the child-centered Mexican family necessitates the reconsideration of the stereotypes of Mexican machismo, it entails remarkable continuity in the expectations of women's roles in their families.

During the 1940s anthropologist Oscar Lewis described the strong patriarchal mode of organization in Mexican rural areas in which women cared for the home and family and men dedicated themselves to agricultural labor (Oropesa 1997). His and others characterization of a strict division of labor by gender has led to a false imagery of Mexican fathers.

> The Mexican-men-have-nothing-to-do-with-the-children perspective corresponds in part to an antiquated image many in and outside Mexico have of gender relations there, a picture largely based on real and/or imagined, past and/or present social relations in the Mexican countryside. (Gutmann 1996:68)

In fact, Gutmann (1996) found that while the working class men and women in Mexico City he interviewed considered mothers to be primarily caregivers and fathers to be providers, ties to children were extremely significant for men. Fathers held children in public more often than mothers. Men described fathering as a lifetime commitment, not to be severed when children came of age. Moreover, just as mothering has been described as a mark of Mexican femininity (Melhuus 1996), "most of these men define their own and others' masculinity in part in terms of their active role in parenting" (Gutmann 1996:85).

Gonzalez-Lopez (2006) also describes the great symbolic importance children have for Mexican men in terms of sexual behavior. Although premarital sex is frowned upon for women, men's sexually activity before marriage is encouraged as a sign of masculinity as long as their activities do not result in pregnancy. In rural areas, this

almost always means relationships with sex workers, whereas in urban areas, where birth control is both more accessible and culturally accepted, men's first relationships may be with older female friends. Yet Gonzalez-Lopez's interviews suggest that in the event that premarital sex results in pregnancy, Mexican men from both urban and rural areas feel obligated to marry women they do not love in order to provide for their biological children. Responsibility towards potential children, and providing for their needs, is a key aspect of Mexican masculinity.

If the centrality of children makes for a more dynamic understanding of the ways men enact their roles as family providers, the child-centered family endorses the rather rigid roles of women as being family caregivers, and the emotional center of Mexican family life. Again, according to Lewis (1959) who studied Mexican families in the mid-twentieth century,

> Our data highlight a sharp discrepancy between the generally low status of women in Mexico and their considerable influence in the family, both on their husbands and their children. The mother figure is a deeply internalized symbol which not only affects a man's relationship with his mother but also carries over to his wife. (Lewis 1959:18)

Despite vast changes in Mexican society since, including an increase in female labor force participation and the decrease in the proportion of nuclear family households, not much has appeared to change in the symbolic significance of Mexican mothers. According to Esteinou (2004), despite Mexican women's contributions to family income,

when interviewed, they continue to describe their roles as primarily in homemaking. In addition, many negative comments directed at women who support their families through employment undermine their activities as providers.

> Mexican culture . . . has placed strong emphasis on family life and has a long tradition of valuing and worshipping the role of being a mother. Motherhood is believed to be a major aspect of personal development and role performance that is socially recognized as commonly assigned to women. Although many women are involved in some sort of economic activity, it is symptomatic of continuing values that, when they were asked their occupations, their answers were "housework" and "child-rearing." A popular belief existed that they were "the queens of the house," a statement that recognizes the place of women in many sectors of family and society. (Esteinou 2004:12)

Indeed, Garcia and De Oliveira (1997) found that while urban Mexican women's fertility has declined and their use of child care increased significantly in recent years, the cultural norms toward motherhood as central to a woman's identity have not appeared to change. Across different social classes, motherhood continues to be a defining role for Mexican women.

Thus, if the symbolic idea of men as providers and women as caregivers in Mexican families divides parental roles along gender lines, both men and women share a belief in the centrality of children. Today, children for mothers, as for fathers, are the center of family life. Children are the wealth of the Mexican family. Obligations to

children define the family. Children give Mexican women meaning in their lives through the status they obtain as mothers. And children are what obligate men to their wives and lovers.

Extended Kin

Along with a strict division of gender roles in the family and a shared commitment to children, Mexican families are described as having more dense social ties to extended family than are evident among non-Hispanic whites in the United States (Raley, Burden, and Wildsmith 2004).

In Mexico, anthropologists have often described ties to extended kin as they are expressed in residential patterns (see Nutini, Carrasco, and Taggart 1976). Patrilocal residential patterns predominate in many parts of rural, central Mexico, with most young wives moving in with their husbands' families until the couple can build a home of their own (D'Aubeterre 2002; Fagetti 2002; Robichauax 1997). While women's roles as mothers are significant, their ability to enact these roles is complicated by ties to extended kin, and conflicts between mothers-in-laws and daughters-in-laws are common.

Although ties to extended kin, particularly in-laws, may be conflict ridden, they also are a potential source for child care provision. Shared parenting involving extended kin has been shown to be a common practice in different African cultures (Alber 2003; Goody 1982; Verhoef 2005), Caribbean families (Chamberlain 2003; Olwig 1999; Soto 1987; Watkins-Owens 2001), and African American communities in the US (Miller 1998; Stack 1974). Anthropologists describe these practices as child fostering, which

specifically refers to the sharing of one or more parenting tasks between more than one set of "parents" (Goody 1982)[11].

I have not been able to find scholarly evidence of child fostering practices in Mexico. As cited above, however, given the ideological primacy of the family in Mexico, there has been little research into the variations in family forms that have been shown to be common elsewhere. My interviews suggest that the dependence on extended kin to care for children–or child fostering–may be more common among non-migrant Mexican families than is suggested in the literature. For example, Nancy, a 33-year-old migrant mother told me that as a child she was sent to live with her mother's sister for two years after her father died. In despair, Nancy described how she had to wake up before everyone else in the house to prepare the tortillas and how her aunt constantly mistreated her. "My only salvation was my uncle," she recalled. When he sat down to eat he would look over at her as she brought him his tortillas and demand to know if his wife had given her anything to eat. If Nancy hadn't eaten, he would reprimand his wife and ensure that she received her meal.

Moreover, a number of women I met in San Angel and elsewhere cared for children who were not biologically their own. Doña Mica, for example, began to care for her brother's two sons while he was in jail and when their own mother left them to live with another man. Another caregiver, who owned a corner store in San Angel, lived with her son and his teen-age daughter. The girl first came to live with her grandmother when

[11] Goody (1982:8) describes five different tasks associated with parenting: bearing and begetting, endowment of civil and kinship status, nurturance, training and sponsorship into adulthood. Child fostering is the sharing of one or more of these tasks between more than one set of parents. Wet-nursing, for example, was a child fostering arrangement in which the nurturance of children under age two was delegated, and–in fact–paid for by wealthy parents. Apprenticeship, on the other hand, was the delegation of the task of training to other parents during adolescence.

her mother went to jail. Her father, at the time, had a severe alcohol addiction and was unable to care for her. After a stay in the hospital, he came back to live in his family home and allegedly sobered up. In Honduras, Schmalzbauer (2005a) found community "other mothers" to be particularly common as caregivers for children left behind by migrant parents.

It would appear, then, that the sharing of parental tasks with extended kin is not uncommon in Mexico and that involvement with extended family can be both cooperative, but also a source of conflict. Verhoef (2005) suggests that in sub-Saharan Africa, the sharing of child care duties is not always practiced in harmonious terms and does not negate the importance of mothers' ties to their children. In Mexico, as among the families Verhoef studied, sharing of child rearing between family members does not appear to contradict or challenge the central role of motherhood to women's identity. Familism may mean that ties to extended family in Mexico are extremely important, but these ties do not appear to supercede the obligations between parents and children.

Another key feature of Mexican families' extended family networks is the prevalence of *compradazgo*, or god parenting, in which godparents are, in effect, fictive kin. While religiously speaking, godparents may be selected to take the place of parents in the event that parents cannot care for children, in Mexico *compradazgo* is a cultural mechanism for reinforcing socio-economic ties and rituals of obligations between neighbors. One anthropologist documented 31 different occasions in which families in Central Mexico might assign godparents for children (Nutini 1976). These fictive kinship networks seem to be more about cementing relationships between adults, than about relationships between adults and children. Like ties to extended family in Mexico, fictive

kinship ties reinforce parent-child relationships. Ties to extended family and to *compadres* can be described as highly important, yet auxiliary to the child-centered, gender specific Mexican nuclear family.

Going Transnational

Given the cultural construct of Mexican familism based on the salience of gender roles, the availability of extended kin ties, and above all the child centered family, what happens to contemporary families when migrant parents leave children in Mexico to seek economic opportunity in the United States?

AS many studies have shown migration has re-shaped gender relations within Mexican families (Hirsch 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). The popular refrain, *en el norte la mujer manda* or–in the north, women rule–captures the sentiment that women experience a substantial increase in power vis-à-vis men when families move to the US (D'Aubeterre 2000; Hirsch 2003). Hirsch (2003) suggests that women have more power post migration due to a combination of factors. These include: the greater likelihood that women work for pay outside the home, the increased intervention of local police in cases of domestic violence (giving women leverage in dealing with abusive husbands), and the greater freedom women have to move in public spaces–to jobs for example–without community scrutiny. Men, in contrast, often feel their movement restricted in the United States due to their undocumented status, whereas in Mexico they had free reign of public spaces.

When women migrate to work, whether alone or to join husbands, their relationships to men change. As such, it would seem likely that when mothers migrate, mothering, as a cultural construct would be challenged (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila

1997). After all, from a distance, mother's direct involvement in the daily care of children is drastically reduced, undermining their ability to fulfill caregiving duties. In the West Indies, Soto (1987) suggests that migrant mothers adopt new definitions of mothering. One of her informants in New York who left her children in Saint Vincent, for example, declared, "I am raising them [children]. I am giving them more nutritious things to eat" (p. 138). It is possible that Mexican mothers also describe their roles as providers as eclipsing and enhancing their role of family caregiver after migration.

It would also seem likely that the ideals of honor and economic provision would be affected by the labor migration of fathers. We can hypothesize that the cultural constructs of the Mexican family support fathers' migration, at least much more so than when mothers migrate. After all, when fathers migrate, they may be showing children how to act honorably when one is unable to provide for one's family at home. However, the insecurities involved in labor migration, specifically in joining the low wage labor force in the United States as an undocumented worker, may undermine migrant men's ability to provide for their families. Does a father's migration enhance or diminish his roles as family provider?

It is not clear how important extended families are to mothers' migration. In the West Indies, the cultural predisposition towards child fostering has been described as an enabling factor in female migration patterns (Chamberlain 2003). Similarly, do the dense network ties of familism help Mexican mothers to migrate? Who parents choose as caregivers for their children when mothers migrate is indicative. As I describe in Chapter 8, only a few family members, almost exclusively grandparents, are considered suitable substitute caregivers. This suggests that there are certain limitations to mobilizing

obligations in extended family networks when it comes to child rearing during international migration. Also, when Mexican mothers migrate, substitute caregivers are invariably women, also a common pattern in the West Indies and Honduras (Chamberlain 2003; Schmalzbauer 2005a; Soto 1987). According to Soto (1987), when children are fostered during migration it strengthens the relationships between women of different generations. Are relationships between women solidified when Mexican mothers migrate? Or, given the cultural importance of mothering, are migrant mothers' ties to their children challenged by substitute foster mothers?

Simultaneous conflict and cooperation may also be evident in expectations of reciprocity between migrant families and caregivers. Goody (1982) suggests that key to the analysis of child fostering strategies is exchange. The delegation of parental roles "requires that either all parties to the transaction consider that the gains at least outweigh the costs or . . . that there be a power imbalance such that one party is forced against his will to accept a situation in which costs outweigh gains" (p. 21). When Mexican mothers leave their children with extended kin to migrate, what types of reciprocal relationships with caregivers at home are created? Under what circumstances, if any, do power imbalances result? Moreover, financial exchange between migrants and non-migrants has been shown to be critical in transnational families (Levitt 2001; Schmalzbauer 2005a; Soto 1987). Given the importance of remittances for families in Mexico and other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, it seems likely that money figures into the relationships with caregivers. It is not clear, however, how family members reconcile the expectation of economic support with ideals of familism and the primacy of extended family needs over individual interests.

Finally, the migration of mothers and or fathers may modify the ways they relate to children in the child-centered Mexican family. According to Ester Goody (1982), rurally based child fostering arrangements often put the needs of parents and those whom she calls "pro-parents" first. She notes that rural children, although they may ultimately benefit from alliances forged through fosterage, are ultimately extra mouths to feed, pawns to pay off a debtor or nurture relations with other families, or a means to fulfill expectations of reciprocity between extended kin. In contrast, child fostering arrangements which have arisen in response to urbanization more directly benefit children who are fostered with the explicit purpose of gaining–on their own–remunerated work, skills for a trade or an education. Whose needs are met when parents migrate internationally and leave children with substitute caregivers? The child-centered family may be reinforced by parents' migration especially if children left behind are the beneficiaries of their parents' sacrifices abroad. However, the need for reciprocity between caregivers and migrant parents may overshadow parents' obligations to provide for their children through migration, thereby ultimately undermining the child-centered nature of the Mexican family. Keeping children's interests at the heart of migration may be an on-going struggle and source of conflict for migrant parents and caregivers.

SUMMARY

This chapter has described why patterns in family migration from Mexico to the United States differ from those in the past and how they connect with trends in transnational motherhood globally. The rise in Mexican transnational mothering can be

viewed as arising out of a historical process in which mothers are now joining men in seeking economic opportunity via labor migration to the United States.

The consequences of such new patterns in Mexican mothers' migration to the United States, particularly for family relationships, are likely to be shaped by the negotiation of culturally specific meanings attributed to the Mexican family in the context of the expectations of economic opportunity via migration. Of utmost importance in evaluating Mexican transnational families' experiences is familism in its three main manifestations: (1) rather rigid gender role expectations with men as providers and women as caregivers, (2) the role of extended kinship networks as both supportive and as a source of conflict, and (3) the overarching centrality of children as the primary wealth of the family. These three aspects of the "cultural construct" of the Mexican family are key to analyzing the types of intergenerational tensions that Mexican families experience during periods of separation, particularly when mothers join the migrant streams.

Chapter 3

MOTHERS LEAVING CHILDREN

Why are Mexican mothers increasingly joining men in leaving children behind to migrate to the United States in search of economic opportunity? This chapter looks at two aspects of the lives of mothers who migrate without their children. First, I describe the demographics of this population and the features of Mexican migration that may make leaving children behind a preferable option for some migrating mothers. Second, I turn to my interviews with migrant mothers to explore their reasons for leaving children behind as compared to those of migrant fathers. Ultimately, a combination of opportunities and constraints, at both the personal and structural levels, explains why mothers are increasingly on the move without their children in Mexican families.

LEAVING CHILDREN BEHIND

Who are the Mexican women who entered the United States over the past 20 to 30 years? Some entered the country legally. While 41 percent of legal Mexican migrants were women in 1985, by 1995 the figure was 57 percent (Cerrutti and Massey 2001). This gender shift is conventionally attributed to family reunification policies. The argument is that when IRCA granted amnesty to undocumented workers in 1986, a majority of whom were Mexican, these men then sent for their wives and children.

While some women who left Mexico in the 1980s and 1990s did join their husbands, family reunification alone cannot explain the increase in female migration rates

over the past two decades (Donato 1993). Indeed, the vast majority of new Mexican migrants are unauthorized (Passel 2005) and women are a significant proportion. Females represented just 11 percent of unauthorized U.S. migrants from Mexico between 1959-1965, but 28 percent between 1990-1995 (Cerrutti and Massey 2001:187). If wives mostly migrated for family reasons, migrant daughters tended to move in order to work in the United States, resembling the migration patterns of husbands and fathers (Cerrutti and Massey 2001). In addition, Kanaiaupuni (2000) found that marital status has a profoundly different effect on migration patterns for Mexican men and women. While married men are more likely to migrate than married (or single) women, divorce significantly affects female migration and has no effect on male migration. Migration also appears to be a significant option for women after a failed marital union.

The rate of female-headed households in Mexico rose significantly between 1978 and 1990, as did divorce rates (Asgary and Pagan 2004), which some researchers attribute to a major shift in household composition accompanying the economic crisis of the 1980s (Selby and Browning 1992). The percentage of nuclear households declined from 73 percent to 62 percent between 1978 and 1990; female-headed households rose from 7 percent to 13 percent during this same period. Female-headed households are concentrated among families in the lowest two quintiles of household income (Selby 1992). Moreover, research in Guadalajara suggests that among the low-income sector, of all family members it was adult women–particularly in female-headed households–who increased their labor force participation the most in response to the 1980s economic crisis (Gonzalez de la Rocha 1992). It is not surprising that these lone mothers, now working

more than ever before, might look to the United States, where male family members had been migrating for years, for employment opportunities.

Indeed, the Pew Hispanic Center's survey of Mexican migrants indicates that transnational mothering is most common among single mothers. Of the entire sample, 15 percent of mothers surveyed reported that some or all of their children lived in Mexico. Yet only 10 percent of married mothers had children in Mexico compared to 19 percent of single mothers, 26 percent of divorced or separated mothers and 34 percent of widowed mothers. Sixty-seven percent of surveyed mothers who had all their children in the United States were married, in contrast to 45 percent of transnational mothers. While leaving children behind is an option for married Mexican women, it is more common for those without a partner, whether they were divorced, separated, widowed or never married.

Data from the Pew Hispanic Center Survey also suggest that transnational mothering is more common among women of lower socio-economic status, specifically those with low levels of education. Only 6 percent of Mexican mothers who live with their children in the United States and 7 percent of transnational mothers are college educated; 38 percent of Mexican mothers whose children live in the United States and 44 percent of transnational mothers have less than a primary school education. Twenty-nine percent of transnational mothers have no schooling whatsoever (see Table 3).

TABLE 3: Mexican Transnational Mothers' Educational Level, Pew Hispanic Survey at Select Mexican Consulates, 2004-2005

	Transnational Mothers
No Schooling (N=41)	29%
Primary School (N=547) (1-6th grade completed)	17%
Secondary School (N=510) (7 – 9th grade completed)	12%
High school (N=277) (10th – 12th grade completed)	13%
University Education (N=89)	19%

In essence, at the aggregate level, the strategy of leaving children behind seems to be adopted most frequently by women who are the most needy. This is particularly interesting given that some research suggests that self-selection for migrants more generally may favor those with higher levels of education (Ibararron and Lubotsky 2005)[12].

Yet poverty alone cannot explain why some women leave their children to migrate while other mothers, who are just as needy, do not. Within the overall context of increased levels of female migration from Mexico to the United States, two salient

[12] Findings on the self-selection of U.S. migrants are mixed, however, and may vary regionally. See Ibararron and Lubotsky (2005) and Hanson and Woodruff (2003) for some of these diverse findings.

features of Mexican migration make transnational mothering a likely strategy to enhance economic opportunity for low-income women, and even more so for single mothers. First, Mexican migration is primarily a social network migration (Massey et al. 1987). Second, it is primarily undocumented (Passel 2005). These two factors often make leaving children behind a viable and preferable option for migrating mothers generally, and especially for single mothers and those with low levels of education.

Opportunities and Risks of Undocumented Migration

Mexican migrants have few options for coming to the United States legally. Even though U.S. immigration policy has a number of provisions for family reunification, family members of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents often must wait years before they can lawfully enter the country. In April 2006, for example, the applications being processed for Mexican spouses and minor children of legal permanent residents had been filed in June of 1999, nearly seven years earlier. The applications being processed for the legal migration of Mexican unmarried sons and daughters of U.S. citizens over age 21 were filed in February 1992, over 14 years earlier (U.S. Department of State 2006). Parents may file for their minor children to find that after seven years or so on the waiting list, the children are no longer minors, adding complications–and additional years before they can legally migrate particularly if they get married.

Not surprisingly, there is an ever-increasing number of undocumented immigrants in the United States. Recent estimates suggest that between 80 and 85 percent of Mexican migrants who arrived after 1995 were unauthorized (Passel 2005). Although disadvantageous in many ways, undocumented entry actually allows a Mexican mother certain options unavailable to her documented counterparts from some countries like the

Philippines who must adhere to the stipulations of employment contracts to avoid deportation (see Cohen 2000; Tyner 1999). In addition, as compared to other undocumented, Mexican women only must cross one border to arrive to the United States The average smuggling fee from Mexico to the United States is between $1,500 and $2,000 (Cornelius 2004), nowhere near as costly as from most other countries. Immigrants from Ecuador, for example, may pay between $6,000 and $10,000 in smuggler fees (Kyle and Liang 2001). As long as a Mexican mother's presence is undetected, a mother can usually migrate with her family if she can afford the fees. This may also help explain why many of the most needy mothers may migrate first without their children so as to save the money for their children's passage.

Still it is important not to minimize the risks associated with undocumented migration, especially the crossing of an increasingly militarized border, which creates complications for mothers' migrations. The crossing is considerably more dangerous for women than for men (Amnesty International 1998). When women's physical safety is entrusted to paid smugglers, the risk of rape, either by smugglers or other men crossing with them, is omnipresent.

One of the mothers I interviewed described the specific ways women feel at risk during the crossing. According to 28-year-old Zelia, "for women it is much harder because men, they can go to the bathroom wherever. Not us. It is harder for women. And men, they can lie down on a mattress with 8 other men, but not us. It is harder. It is harder for women." After five years in the United States, Zelia went back to visit her son in Mexico for three weeks; it took her a month at the border to cross back to the United States. She was stopped and returned to Mexico nine times by border patrol agents. The

group she traveled with consisted of 3 women and 18 men. Zelia explained how women manage the crossing:

> You know what we do? We look for someone from town to go with. So then when you are going to take a bath, you say to them, watch out for us, and they say, oh sure, and since they know us, they watch out for us. “Don’t come out” they say, “We are going to go for food.” That is why we don’t go alone. Alone, I wouldn’t come.

Although the danger of the crossing doesn’t keep women from migrating, it does mean that once in the United States, mothers are not likely to want to return to Mexico to cross again as many temporary male migrants do. I only interviewed three mothers, including Zelia, who had been home to visit their children. In contrast 13 of the 23 fathers I interviewed had made the trip multiple times. Most women did not want to risk crossing again.

The crossing for children is even more difficult. Fees are higher for minors, and young children are often confined to small spaces, or even given medicines to make them sleep, in order to facilitate the crossing. From a National Public Radio news report:

> (Border) Agents say they've seen smugglers hide children in car trunks, stuff them into dashboards and even in a secret compartment in the gas tank of a truck. In November, a border guard in California found a girl hidden in a three-foot-tall

> Powerpuff piñata. Adele Fasano, who oversees operations at the San Diego port of entry, says when agents pull the kids out, they are often visibly traumatized.
>
> Ms. ADELE FASANO (Agent): "Oh, they're just in very bad shape, you know, either crying and screaming or unresponsive. That's very difficult to deal with; it's not an easy part of the job for our officers." (National Public Radio 2005)

Smugglers often use the greater vulnerability of children, and the charged emotions of parents, who may not have not seen their children in years, to extract higher fees for their services. They have been known to hold children hostage and extort money from parents anxiously awaiting their arrival (Marizco 2004).

The illegal border crossing looms large in the minds of all those I interviewed, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Mothers consider the crossing as a possibility since so many of their compatriots cross the border undetected. However, they recognize that the crossing involves considerably more risks for women than for adult men, and even greater risks for children. Mothers may cross the border, but not want to risk it for their children until children themselves understand what the risk is all about. And, given the dangers of the crossing for women, once in the United States mothers may not count on being able to return home to visit their children as migrant fathers in the past often did. Instead, they plan to come to the United States for a predetermined time and either return for their children or send money for their children to join them in the United States.

Opportunities and Risks of Social Network Migration

As described in Chapter 1, most scholarship on Mexican migration describes the importance of social networks for Mexican immigrants (Massey et al 1987). Indeed, Massey and his colleagues have suggested that when certain communities reach peak levels of migration, a culture of migration emerges which has strong sway on the younger generation. "As migratory behavior extends throughout a community, it increasingly enters the calculus of conscious choice and eventually become normative" (Kandel and Massey 2002:981). These social networks not only influence youth, but also appear to be significant for women in general (see Cerrutti and Massey 2001; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003).

While data are limited, the culture of migration resulting from social networks is just as likely to be important for migrating mothers as for women and young people more generally. The surveys I distributed to school students in the Mixteca and on the coast of Oaxaca and in Puebla allow for a comparison of family migration patterns in different communities. I anticipated finding that in one or two communities the migration of mothers would be more normative. However, as Table 4 shows, there was little variation in the percentage of students with mothers in the United States across the communities, ranging between 4 and 7 percent in the Mixteca. Transnational mothering appears to correlate with the overall levels of family migration, dropping significantly in Tehuacan, Puebla–a major city bordering the Mixteca region to the north–where a significantly lower percentage of students have family members in the United States.

TABLE 4: Mother and Student Migration Patterns among Middle and High School Students Surveyed in Select Schools in Oaxaca and Puebla, 2004-2005

School [13]	**Some family in US**	**Mother in US**[14]	**Self was in US**
Puebla	*% students*	*% students*	*% students*
Tehuacan HS	50	0.5	2
Tehuacan HS	60	0.3	5
Tehuacan MS	59	2	4
Mixteca, Oax.			
San Marcos MS	100	6	3
Tlapancingo. HS	96	4	4
Tlapancingo. MS	95	7	3
Calihuala MS	97	5	9
Santa Cruz MS	96	4	17
Santa Rosa MS	100	7	14
Tamazola HS	98	5	2
Tamazola MS	96	6	5
Guadalupe HS	98	4	6
Guadalupe MS	93	7	7
Zocoteaca MS	100	7	0
San Nicolas MS	100	5	7
Mariscala HS	97	7	3

[13] MS= Middle School, HS=High School
[14] Includes siblings and/or parents.

Mariscala MS	96	6	3
Huajuapan MS	89	5	10
Coast, Oax.			
San Jose HS	90	8	2
San Jose MS	89	6	4

This is not to say that differences among communities do not exist. As Table 4 also shows, I found striking variation in the percentage of students who have been to the United States in different communities, ranging from 0 to 17 percent in two similarly sized towns in the Mixteca[15]. This suggests that in some communities the return migration of children is much more common than in others, perhaps owing to a greater portion of parents with legal permanent residence in the United States. In contrast, it seems that the migration of mothers is a small but fairly consistent pattern in most communities with high levels of out-migration. In other words, transnational mothering appears related to the overall level of migration networks available in a given community.

For mothers, social networks are essential as they can make the crossing possible and can reduce some of the uncertainties involved in migration. They can facilitate arrival, job opportunities, and housing and make undocumented migrants feel that there is some safety in numbers in the well-established communities they often join (see also Della Giusta and Kambhampati 2006). Mexican women, more than men, rely on social

[15] In Santa Cruz del Bravo, population of 350 in 2000, 17 percent of middle school students surveyed in 2004 had been to the US. In Zocoteaca, a community of 405 residents in 2004, none of the middle school students surveyed in 2004 had been to the US.

networks, particularly family based networks, during migration (Cerrutti and Massey 2001; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Hirsch 2003).

However, the nature of dependence on social networks in the face of illegal entry may encourage a pattern in which children stay behind. For one, mothers do not know what life will be like once they reach the United States. As undocumented workers, mothers and their family members can be returned to Mexico at any time. Although many have friends and family already abroad, aside from stories passed along the grapevine, they do not know much about living in the United States. Most have never lived in a foreign country before and do not speak English. They usually do not know where they will work or what they will eat and cannot predict what it will be like to live with family and/or friends already in the United States. The only certainty is that life will not be the same as in Mexico. So while women may be willing and able take the risk themselves, they are often unwilling to place their children in such conditions, especially since migration as a family introduces greater levels of insecurity about child care, schooling, and health care. Once a family has roots in the United States, deportation of a parent is much more costly to the entire family and is potentially agonizing if the family is split up during the deportation process (Bernstein 2004). All of the women I spoke with described their decision to leave their children behind as temporary and expected to be reunited with them within a year or two.

Second, trusted social networks take time to cultivate. The opportunities they provide increase over time, and trusted networks are best developed by those who have already made the trek abroad. Once a mother has made necessary contacts within the United States, it is much easier for her to plan for reunification with her children. Two

mothers I interviewed in New Jersey, Paula and Nicandra, for example, saved up the money for their teenage boys' crossings by themselves, but their boyfriends in the United States were the ones to make arrangements for the boys to travel with friends and not alone.

The availability of social networks to facilitate the undocumented crossing into the United States means that individual Mexican mothers have some options in determining their migration strategy. They can migrate without legal status and with their children, if they can cultivate networks and save money to do so. What many mothers do is stagger migration, going to the United States first to test the waters before sending for their children.

The cultivation of social networks over time is perhaps most important for those who lack other resources, such as monetary or human capital, and who have limited levels of family support. As shown above, transnational mothering is relatively common among women with low levels of education. It is also more common among women who are widowed, separated or divorced, in other words, among mothers who have recently lost the support of a husband, and the financial and kinship ties he might have offered. The nature of the undocumented crossing combined with the reliance on social networks among Mexican migrants makes leaving children behind a sensible option for migrating mothers.

MIGRATION DECISIONS

Given that these features of Mexican migration make it practical for some mothers, particularly those with relatively few resources in Mexico, to leave their

children behind, how do mothers arrive at the decision to pursue the migration narrative once restricted to the world of men? Stories of individual mothers indicate that a great variety of circumstances may lead mothers to seek economic opportunities in the United States. Since all parents I interviewed described work as the primary goal of migration, a detailed look at the circumstances surrounding mothers' migration decisions–in contrast to those of fathers–illustrates why mothers' decisions may ultimately be quite different from those of men, and differ markedly according to the nature of the migrants' marital relationship.

Fathers

Among fathers, 20 of the 23 I interviewed were married[16] to their children's mother at the time they first left their children to come to the United States, although four had previously migrated as single men prior to marrying in Mexico. One of the unmarried fathers first migrated at the age of 16, met and married his wife in the United States, and returned to Mexico with her and his children. He migrated again after they got divorced. Another father had divorced and remarried while in Mexico. Although still in contact with his son from a prior marriage, he migrated together with his second wife and their three children. The third unmarried father had sent his children back to Mexico after migration to the United States when he and his wife decided to separate. Aside from these cases in which marital problems more directly shaped fathers' decisions to live apart from their children, all of the migrant men I interviewed described the income-generating prospects in the United States as their primary motivation for leaving children behind.

[16] I consider those living in a state of common-law marriage to be married for the purposes of this discussion.

Underlying fathers' labor migration were their obligations as family providers. One father's description of migration as an escape from financial difficulties in Mexico is typical. He stated that his reasons for migrating were purely economic. This 40-year-old father was born in a very small town in the outskirts of a small city in Oaxaca. "We were very poor." Until the age of 24, he worked as a farmer cultivating corn, chiles and beans. When his three children were six, four, and two he and his entire family moved into the city (including his parents, sisters and brothers) where he worked unloading trucks. He earned about 100 pesos a day (equivalent to $10 at the time of the interview), which was barely enough to feed his family. "I had no land or anything else in my name." Frustrated at his lack of opportunities, he decided to go north when a friend who had been once before offered to take him.

Observable differences among fathers were related to the combination of pressures that precipitated their migration. While all expressed feelings of economic hardship and of a lack of mobility, some described their migration as directly related to acute problems at work. For example, one father had been employed at a factory that manufactured soccer balls. He migrated after the plant closed, he became unemployed, and no other comparable jobs were available locally. Another father left after he lost his job as a bodyguard for a wealthy family.

Fathers living in communities with high levels of out-migration described the pressure to become labor migrants in the United States more broadly and as being related to the fact that so many others in their community had already done so. This is consistent with the thesis of Massey and his collaborators that social networks in Mexico exert a cumulative effect (see Massey, Goldring and Durand 1994). For example, one father said

he first left home while young and single. He had recently fallen in love and felt that the only way he could honorably marry his fiancé was to migrate and save enough money to afford the type of wedding typical of other men in his town who had migrated. Another father from a town near San Angel was also motivated by community pressures. Although working in a stable government job, his earnings were much lower than those described by neighbors who had returned from the United States. When the opportunity arose, he left his family to work in New Jersey. In fact, *sobresalir* was the most common word both fathers and mothers used when initially describing their motivations for migration, which translates into to excel or surpass others. In the context of migration, parents use the word *sobresalir* to describe a goal of raising their family out of the poverty in which others in their community live. Inherent in fathers' goals to *sobresalir* via migration is relative mobility. In dual economy transnational communities, fathers who migrate are considered to be upwardly mobile in their respective communities; they hope to join the rank of the "remittance bourgeoisie" (Smith 2006:50).

At the individual level, nearly all the fathers I interviewed had a friend who was influential in either suggesting or facilitating the move abroad. Many did not consider migration until a friend offered it as a way out of the economic stagnation they were experiencing. One father, for instance, had originally migrated from his small town in Oaxaca to northern Mexico with his family. When he met someone who offered to help him cross the border, he took his family back to Oaxaca where they had family to sustain them during his absence.

Many fathers described the pressure to migrate from their family members as being more intense than that from their peers. One young father said that his four brothers

were already working in California when he came to the United States and had pressured him join them only a year after he was married. Similarly, Pedro said he first migrated at age 16 before he was married. “I never wanted to come, but I was working in Mexico City in a factory and I had a brother in California who sent me the money to migrate. Since he sent the money, I had to go.” Jose was the first brother to work in the United States, but also felt compelled to leave due to his relationship with his siblings.

> I was a manager at the company, but it was a very stressful job and I had a hard time working with my supervisors. But I also felt a lot of stress because I was not as successful as my brothers and sisters. We come from a humble background. They all have done well and their houses were nicer than mine. I felt like the one most behind.

The most distressing source of pressure fathers described was from their wives. Daniel, who had been to the United States before he was married to save for his wedding, had wanted to stay in Mexico after he returned home. He only agreed to migrate again as a newlywed because his wife insisted that she wanted to live in the United States. Armando also said that he was reluctant to leave his family. Although many of his brothers were already working in New Jersey and he had been offered the opportunity to leave before, Armando only left at his wife’s insistence that they would be able to build a house with his remittances.

Fathers’ stories suggest that underlying economic pressures were those of a more personal nature. It is possible that marital conflicts precipitated some fathers’ decisions to

leave. For others, migration may be a marital escape hatch that enables men to maintain the honorable titles of husband and father while avoiding conflicts at home. All but two fathers considered themselves the head of their children's household in Mexico post-migration. For example, after telling me that he migrated after losing his job as a bodyguard, one father confided "I left because I couldn't stand it anymore." He went on to explain that his wife was extremely unhappy because of all the time he had to spend away from her at work, causing him to lose his job. They did not officially separate, however, until he returned from the United States four years later and he rented his own room rather than move back into the house. Although his wife surely had a different perspective on the martial break-up which probably included his abandonment and drug abuse post-migration, ten years later he still described his obligations to provide economically for his wife and children as the principal motivation for his migration.

Given the prevalence of marital difficulties post-migration (see Frank 2005b), it is impossible to discern whether the fathers I interviewed used migration as a marital escape hatch or whether migration was the cause of their marital problems. However, it was clear that even the fathers who were in troubled marriages expected themselves to continue to financially support their wives and children in Mexico post-migration. Particularly in cases where substance abuse difficulties made fathers' actual provision of financial support erratic and often non-existent, fathers' expectations of themselves may well have outlasted their wives (and children's) frustrated expectations of them.

In short, fathers uniformly described their labor migration as a straightforward path to fulfilling their role as economic providers of the family. Their decisions to migrate hinged upon the expectation that migration would lead to greater economic

opportunity than was available in Mexico. The circumstances surrounding fathers' migration decisions, including conflicts with their wives, unemployment and sibling rivalry, illuminate the multiple ways the pressures to provide manifested themselves in fathers' lives.

While some fathers planned to be reunited with their families in the United States a few years after their own migration, most felt they could achieve more by living in the United States without their children. Many expressed strong opinions as to why it was better that their children be raised in Mexico. When I asked one father whether he thought about bringing his children to New Jersey he said, "Definitely not because here there is no family life." Another said he did not want his kids being raised in the United States because "here the kids forget they are Mexican." A father of two teenagers in Mexico explained "I am not the kind of person who likes this life for my children. Here there is too much freedom for them. It is not really a safe environment. I prefer that they stay in Mexico where they can receive a good education."

Living apart from children does not affect fathers' ability to provide financially for them. In fact, living apart from their children may enable fathers to provide for children more effectively, at least at the symbolic level, as lone fathers are theoretically better able to put more energy into income-producing activities. For mothers, however, migration is incongruent with their role as family caregiver as it necessitates a physical separation from children, which drastically diminishes their ability to care for children. Mothers' stories about their decisions to leave their children when they migrate were more complex, and differed according to their marital status at the time of migration.

Married Mothers

A common pattern in Mexican migration is for women to follow their men to the United States in a step migration pattern (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Indeed 14 of the 22 mothers I interviewed migrated to join their husbands. While it follows that mothers' migration is part of a concerted family migration strategy, my interviews with mothers show that it is a mistake to assume that family reunification is a process in which men decide the family should live together and subsequently send for their wives. Consistent with other research with Latina immigrants (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Pessar 1999; Woo 2000), I found that most wives were instrumental in the decision-making process, with 12 of the 14 reporting having orchestrated their own migration. Only one mother migrated according to the reunification scenario presented by demographers when her husband, who had achieved legal permanent residency, applied for her immigration. The second said she came because it was her marital duty to do so, saying, "My husband sent for me because he wanted me to cook for him."

All other married mothers described migration as affording them personal benefits in addition to being advantageous for the family unit. For example, when Nancy grew severely depressed after her husband migrated and she was left with their one-year-old child and a full time job, she gave him an ultimatum. Either he had to return to Mexico or take her to the United States, or he could forget the marriage. The husband complied and Nancy migrated. Many explained their decision to migrate like one mother who said, "I wanted to know what it was like." In fact, even husbands described their wives as being the primary movers behind family migration. One father living with his wife and U.S. born daughter and with two children in Mexico, told me, "It was her. She told me she

wanted to come and see what it was like here." Another who lived with his wife and newborn said, "I didn't want her to come, but she insisted."

Moreover, while residents of San Angel reported that it was common for men to come back from the United States during the winter holidays, or during the town *feria*, to look for wives, women in Mexico also actively pursued suitors among those with prior migration experience. Three mothers said they deliberately married men in Mexico who had already been to the United States so they would eventually be able to migrate. "I wanted to come since before (I met my husband)," explained one mother saying she has lots of cousins in Newark, New Jersey. She had asked them to help her migrate, but they thought it was a bad idea for a young woman to come alone. "Only the men in my family were in the north," she said. "How old were you when you decided you wanted to go to the United States?" I asked. "I was about 15." This mother said her relatives told her that if she wanted to come north, she would have to marry someone who already had migrated. That is precisely what she did.

To understand why mothers so often choose to join their husbands in the United States, and orchestrate their own migration, it is crucial to consider the lives they leave behind. Although I heard of many cases in which couples migrated together, most were childless; all but one of the married mothers I interviewed joined husbands already abroad. Consequently most had been in Mexico raising children without their husbands yet dependent on remittances from abroad. What does the international separation of husbands and wives do to a marriage?

One of the principal changes in the marriage after a husband leaves is that the husband, who had once been the primary participant in various productive aspects of

family life, such as the cultivation of corn or other crops, is transformed into "he who sends money home." When the role of men in families becomes monetarized, women at home take up the slack. Women increasingly engage in both unpaid and paid labor when their husbands are away (Boehm 2004; Kanaiaupuni 2000; Mummert 1988). They often take over their husbands' responsibilities, for example, in cultivating family fields (Fagetti 2000). For instance, since Pedro has been away, Yolanda of San Angel plants peanuts and beans twice a year with the help of her daughters and the men she hires to do the heavy labor. Other women join the formal labor market when their husbands leave. Mummert (1988) has found that a scarcity of male labor resulting from migration leads women and children to work in jobs previously dominated by men.

When husbands are away, work within the home also intensifies. Although women are often primarily responsible for the cooking and washing involved in child care, Mexican men do partake in family life and share in discipline as well as recreational activities with children. After husbands leave, mothers may feel overburdened, not only with work, but also the responsibility involved in child care. Gabriela, a schoolteacher, hired someone to help with housework when her husband Angelo left. Regardless, she often returned home late from work and said she was always tired. "When I lie down at night I am exhausted. What is most tiring is having the responsibility for the children. It is much better when he [Angelo] is back visiting because he takes over looking after the children . . . I feel like it is a load off my back when he is here." Yolanda also said the hardest thing about being away from her husband for seven years was not the work she has picked up in his absence, but that "all the responsibility for my children is on me. I have to be mom and dad for my children."

Wives of migrants acknowledged some benefits to living alone. According to one wife of a migrant, "When I am alone, I feel more at ease. I mean, when he is here at home and isn't drinking, it is all okay. But when he goes out, he drinks." Yolanda explained that there is a certain amount of work associated with seeing to her husband's needs she is relieved of while he is away.

> When he was here, my life was very different. If I went to buy something, it was to come back quickly and not to be long. And when he was here I was always worried thinking about what he was going to eat and what I would prepare for dinner . . . now I go out and I go with my two daughters. I am relaxed and I come back when I want.

A 19-year-old woman in San Angel married for two years agreed. "At times there is a lot of freedom because when he is here you cannot do anything. But if he isn't here, you can go out and come back whenever you want."

The increased freedom, however, is often closely monitored by community members, as will be discussed further in Chapter 10. In particular, wives of migrants often have contentious relationships with their in-laws. This is especially true for new brides, who typically live with their mother-in-law until their husband can send home money to build the couple's own house (D'Aubeterre 2000:72). Wives, without the support of their husbands, are increasingly vulnerable to their in-laws' scrutiny and work standards, which can, at its most extreme form, include physical abuse. To avoid conflict,

a number of women interviewed moved back with their own families after their husbands left for the United States (see also D'Aubeterre 2002 on Puebla).

Aside from an increase in work and the intensified relationships with in-laws, the separation of wives and husbands during migration enhances the dependency of wives on their husbands. Wives in Mexico are completely divorced from the work of their migrant husbands; they do not prepare their lunches, wash their work clothes, or help them to relax after a long day. They cannot care for their husbands as they otherwise would be expected to do according to the cultural constructs of women's roles in the family. In fact, their only connection to their husbands' work is via the money sent home. Wives not only anticipate money, they also anxiously await phone calls or other news of their husbands. At a distance, phone communication becomes even more crucial to sustaining what would otherwise become a purely economic relationship. Yet due to the high costs of making international phone calls from San Angel (80 cents per minutes), family members in the United States are almost always the ones to call home. The decision to initiate contact, with the exception of the briefest phone call just to say, "call me back", is out of wives' hands. Table 5 illustrates how the cost of phone calls generates a unidirectional flow of communication from migrants in the United States to their family members in Mexico.

TABLE 5: Costs of Phone Communication between New Jersey and Oaxaca, 2005-2006

	United States to Mexico	**Mexico to the United States**
Calling Cards	**@ 5-10 cents/minute** ($2 card lets you talk for 20 – 30 minutes). • Can be used from any phone, public, private, cell phones, etc… • Often can only use the card once to obtain low rates. • Note: calls to cellular phones in Mexico may be more expensive.	**@ 50 cents / minute** (20 peso card lets you talk for 4 minutes) • Can only be used at public phones, which are usually only located in large towns and cities in Oaxaca. • Not available in San Angel.
Casetas (public phone booths in Mexico)	**@ 50 cents** to receive a call in San Angel for a call of any duration .	**@ 80 cents / minute**
Phone line in home	**@ 10 cents / minute** • This is with international calling plan that costs $5 per month • In addition there is the basic cost of a phone line at $40 per month.	**@ 45 – 85 cents / minute** • Rate depends on use and time of day of calls. • In addition there is the basic cost of phone line at $30 per month[17].
Cell phone	**@ 10 cents / minute** • With international calling plan costing $5 per month. • In addition is the basic cost of the phone starting at $40 per month (but may be more depending on minutes in plan).	**@ 2 dollars / minute[18]** • Costs of receiving calls vary • Prepaid phone cards are also often used for home-based cell phones where landlines are unavailable.

[17] http://www.telmex.com/mx/esto/infoEmp_tmxTarifasCompetitivas.html
[18] e-mail correspondence with Telcel April 5, 2007.

The anxiety around phone calls is amplified by technical difficulties. San Angel, for example, had two public phone shops, or *casetas*, in 2004 where town residents could receive calls. Over 200 homes had private phone lines. But just seven years earlier, there was only one *caseta* and a just handful of town residents had their own phones. One woman recalled that when her husband was away in New York, "I would get desperate sometimes because I went and then I would never get a call. So sometimes, then I would go the next day to wait again, but other times I just did not." Even with improvements in communication services, it is often difficult to reach people on the weekends or some holidays, when all lines may ring busy or when the phone lines are periodically down (during my seven months in town this happened five times).

In addition, U.S. relatives almost always call with phone cards, the cheapest way to communicate, and talk until the card runs out, which can be an abrupt end to a conversation. One day I called Nydia from the United States. She was feeling blue about her husband's return to New Jersey without her after they had had marital difficulties in Mexico. Our conversation was cut off when my phone card unexpectedly expired. So I bought another card and called back. Nydia explained, "The truth is I am feeling down about things . . . he [husband] never calls and this gets me down because I say at least he should call for the children, but no." On further inquiry, I found out they spoke just a week ago. "But when he calls it is just for a little bit, until the card runs out. He would never go and buy another one like you just did." It would seem it is more the dependency on the calls, than the actual frequency, which was particularly hard for Nydia.

Research on transnational families in Mexico suggests that one reason women decide to migrate is to go after men who have abandoned them post-migration

(D'Aubeterre 2000; Fagetti 2000). As described in Chapter 4, when economic problems ensue in the United States, fathers' communication home may wane. It may be true that some women in Mexico make the trek north in response to perceived abandonment. Yet my interviews suggest that women do not only exhibit independence when they feel they have been abandoned. Rather, even married mothers who talk frequently to their husbands may move because they want to be part of the action. The international separation of couples puts mothers in a situation of dependency on their absent husbands. Physically divorced from the everyday activities of their spouses, women's influence in their husbands' lives diminishes. For some, this means greater freedom of activity in Mexico (Fagetti 2000). For others, separation results in feelings of passivity. Wives move north, as mothers and fathers told me, because they want to. Migration is a way women regain control over their family lives.

Yet mothers often felt conflicted between wanting to be a part of their husbands' lives and caregiving obligations to their children. If some mothers desperately wanted to join husbands, most were extremely reluctant to leave their children behind and may prevent mothers' from migrating. Gabriela, for example, said she hates living apart from Angelo and would like to join him abroad, but that would mean leaving her four boys in someone else's care. To migrate with her four children would be prohibitively expensive. Another woman in San Angel said she felt quite upset while her husband was living in New York and that the couple discussed her joining him. She eventually decided not to leave. "I saw other couples who had both left. And I saw their children dirty in the street, with dirty clothes, and I didn't want that for my children."

For the married mothers I interviewed in New Jersey, the decision to leave children behind arose from practical considerations. Most often they cited the danger in the crossing. One said, "I wouldn't risk taking them via the mountain" and another added, "I didn't know what the crossing would be like. For me, I knew I could do it, but not for them." Mothers also worried about child care. One mother, for example, explained, "you also have to have a place to put them." Some mothers said they planned to migrate with their children but were dissuaded by family members. Ofelia said her husband was adamant that she migrate together with their then two-year-old son. Her mother convinced her otherwise, saying she didn't know where she would live or who would be available to take care of the baby. Married mothers said they thought about bringing their children along and decided against it, either on their own or because their own family members discouraged them from doing so. Their decision to leave their children arose from the belief that separation would be temporary.

Single Mothers

I interviewed eight women who migrated as single mothers. One came to the United States after an unplanned pregnancy as a teenager and one mother left when her husband died. Six mothers got divorced or separated and migrated because they could not make ends meet with jobs in Mexico. In every case, as among fathers, the primary motivation behind migration was financial. Zelia, for example, only lived with her son's father for six months and actually moved back with her mother before her son was born because "he drank a lot and liked to go out a lot with other women." Zelia had stopped studying while in ninth grade, like many in her town, because "there wasn't enough (money) for more." As a teenager Zelia worked in town, at the library or helping teachers

out. “They gave me 300 pesos a month. What is that here? That is like $30 a month. It is nothing.” While earning so little worked while single, once Zelia had a child it wasn’t enough. “It is difficult because there isn’t any work. The children ask for things, and we don’t have anything to give them. And my siblings were here, but it isn’t the same, so I talked to them [about migrating] and they said yes.” Zelia left her son when he was a year old; when interviewed he was six. Migration places these single mothers in the position of family breadwinners.

Why do single mothers decide to leave rather than battle it out in Mexico? Mothers themselves always cited the economic difficulties of being a single mother in Mexico. Nicandra, for example, had worked at a few jobs in Acapulco after leaving her husband but couldn’t make ends meet. Her son, 19-year-old Tony recalled, “The economic situation was terrible. I remember how she used to wring her hands and crack her knuckles because she was always so nervous.” Nicandra explained, “Sometimes I didn’t know where to get the next meal.” But all single mothers have a difficult time, and what is important is distinguishing why some leave when others do not. A closer look at mothers’ motivations shows a combination of opportunity and lack of conformity to the single mother lifestyle often prompts migration.

The first condition for single mothers’ migration is that they have family members in the United States who are willing to help. This was true for one mother, who had emotional difficulties after her marriage ended when her husband was unfaithful.

> Sometimes I took it out on the kids, because I was so upset about what had happened. And then when we went to visit my brother they would tell him I hit

> them. And my brother–who is a psychologist–recommended me to a friend. I told him I am not crazy. But then he explained that psychologists aren't for crazy people, but they are to talk to about what you are feeling so you can feel better. So I went to talk to him a number of times, and it was true. I told him what happened–how I was so mad at my ex–and how what hurt the most was that he didn't seem to care about the kids. Sometimes I cried with him. And it helped me a lot.

This mother wasn't handling her marital break up well and her work cleaning hotel rooms barely made ends meet. This is when her sister living in New Jersey offered to help her migrate. Her siblings discussed the possibility, and arranged to care for her children while she was away. In this case, as in many others, family members enabled migration to be a strategy to help single mothers overcome the difficulties faced after a divorce.

Other single mothers followed not the path of their own family members, but that of their ex-husbands. As mentioned above, according to Fagetti (2000) and D'Aubeterre (2000), at times women from Puebla decide to migrate after their husbands in the US abandon them. In San Angel, I heard similar stories. One young woman got pregnant when she was just 16 to a young man in town who had been working in the United States. Her migrant father wanted to kick her out for this transgression, but since he too was away in *el norte*, he couldn't do much about it when her mother decided to support her. Before giving birth, the boyfriend left and went back to work abroad. The young mother followed when her daughter was just a year old and remarkably was able to catch up with

her baby's father. The strategy worked for a time; the couple moved in together and had another baby together.

Aside from following family members during migration, single mothers all seemed share the desire to start their life anew. Once I spent time living in San Angel, I came to understand that the reason migration is such an important alternative for single mothers is that it is tied to the meaning of marriage in small town Mexico.

In San Angel brides are often quite young. I had heard stories from Mexicans in New Brunswick about girls getting married at age 14 or 15 in their hometowns, but didn't comprehend the implications until the day I first spoke with Marta[19]. At age 19 Marta was an attractive and friendly young woman who, although having dropped out of school when she was in 10th grade, was taking computer classes. From my field notes after our interview:

> Marta asked me how old I am. I told her 28. "So you had Temo when you were 25?" she asked. "Yeah" and I added that with one exception, I was the first to have a child of all my friends and even now at 28 most aren't married yet. Marta was surprised, "I kind of feel the same way, but the opposite. All of my friends are married with kids already." I said I had noticed that girls here marry young. "Yes," Marta added, "One of the brides this September was 15. . . I feel like I should already be married."

As I pursued this line of inquiry with people I met in town, the reality filtered in. Marta, and others like her, who has a seemingly bright future at age 19 was on the verge

[19] Marta is not a member of a family constellation.

of being considered *masisa* or *pasada*, over-ripe for marriage, if she stayed in town much longer. When I interviewed one woman, who had married at age 17 to a 26-year-old man who had previously been in the United States, she explained why she felt glad to be married to a migrant, "At my age [19] no one would even look at me. They all want young girls." Her sister-in-law, sitting in on the interview, was just 16 and had married at age 14 to a 20-year-old man. She added, "by 22 they are too *masisa* to get married."

The preference for young brides leaves single mothers out in the cold. Not only are they over-ripe fruit, but since they are no longer virgins and have already been "eaten" they are no longer marriage material (see Gonzalez-Lopez 2005). I only met a few single mothers in town who had remarried. Most were resigned to spinsterhood. Being alone, of course, didn't mean women couldn't have a sex life. A local teacher, for example, identified herself as a single mother. She had an 11-year-old girl and a 2-year-old son. "I know I am crazy, but I just decided I wanted another baby." I didn't need to ask to know that the baby's father was not part of her family picture. To be a single mother is to adopt an independent parenting lifestyle.

Transplanted to New Jersey, only two single mothers I interviewed lived alone, one of whom has since moved in with a boyfriend. The other six, as well as the three mothers who divorced their husbands after migrating, all lived with boyfriends. It is true that living alone on low wages in the United States is impractical for undocumented women workers. Yet many single Mexican women in Central New Jersey live with family members or friends; there appear to be housing options without moving in with men. In fact, it seems that migration provides single women with the opportunity to re-enter the marriage market. For example, one 17-year-old single mother in San Angel

worked two jobs in town while her mother and sisters cared for her toddler. She explained that she wanted to migrate "because of necessity–to work", but she recognized that migrant life would be hard. "I know that they [migrants] suffer there," she told me. "They humiliate them. They work every day from day to night. I know they pay well, but you have to work a lot. Here we don't pay rent, but there you pay for everything, rent, electricity, gas and more." Underlying her desire to earn more money via migration, this young mother also hoped to eventually be able to get married. However, she did not expect this to happen in Mexico. "They don't think of you as a real thing [here], they see you as easy. And if they want me and love me, it has to be the whole package." Like other single mothers I met, her migration plans were motivated not only by economics, but also by the chance to find someone who would accept the package deal. Living without children in the United States may make this goal more feasible.

Ironically, some single mothers married men from their hometowns once in the United States. Zelia, 28 at the time, had recently married a 25-year-old man from town after she migrated without her son born out of wedlock. In San Angel, where a young woman I interviewed complained that she was criticized for marrying an old man (27 to her 17), this pairing would not have been socially acceptable. According to Hirsch (2003), there are changes in courtship patterns and concepts of intimacy and marriage among younger-generation Mexican couples living in the United States. In the United States, the meaning of marriage changes and subsequently being a single mom does not carry the same stigma it does in small communities like San Angel. Migration without their children provides single mothers a second chance at marriage.

MIGRATING MOTHERS

In describing the structures of opportunity and constraint that shape mothers' migration, this chapter shows that the migration of Mexican mothers is fundamentally different from that of Mexican fathers in key ways. For one, mothers who decide to migrate and leave children behind in Mexico appear to have fewer available resources as compared to other migrant mothers. They have lower levels of education and are often single mothers who have experienced a divorce or have been widowed. Losing access to the resources of an ex-spouse may leave these women with few options, making migration without their children the most viable family survival strategy.

Although data on the socio-economic status of Mexican transnational mothers is tentative, it is extremely telling as compared to the migration of Mexican transnational fathers. Today, research findings on the self-selection of Mexican migrants are somewhat mixed (see Hanson and Woodruff 2003; Ibararron and Lubotsky 2005)[20]. Yet, as described in the previous chapters, the first fathers to leave their communities to work in the United States were almost always those with some social standing in their communities (Massey et al. 1987). Migrant male pioneers had to have some resources available to them in order to make the trek north. For the most part, these transnational fathers were not the men with the lowest socio-economic status. In contrast, pioneer transnational mothers–particularly single mothers–appear to be needier, at least as compared to other migrant women who are perhaps able to take their children with them to the United States. Transnational mothers are likely to have greater access to the social

[20] Some find that migrants are better educated than non-migrants and others have found that the education level of migrants and non-migrants are similar. The differences may depend upon the region of origin within Mexico and also sampling and analytical techniques.

networks they need to successfully cross the border than other single mothers in Mexico, who may not be able to even consider migration. Nonetheless, they are clearly in a different position when they seek employment in the United States than fathers. The stakes are higher for these transnational mothers when they invest in the possibility of economic mobility via migration. In contrast, transnational fathers may have other options for supporting their families, albeit undesirable ones, in Mexico. Notably, all the fathers I interviewed worked in Mexico prior to migration, whereas few mothers had. Many mothers explained that there were no employment opportunities for women in their communities of origin.

Despite the economic necessity underlying transnational mothers' migrations to the United States, their stories about their decisions to migrate highlight another key difference between their experiences and those of transnational fathers. Transnational fathers all sought migration as the means to fulfill their duties to provide for their families. Fathers' motivations were economic, and only in a few cases did they describe other underlying issues as shaping their decisions to leave home. In contrast, mothers- both married and single- came to the United States to work, but all described individual motivations as being just as compelling, if not more so. Some mothers said they migrated to be part of the action; they wanted to see where the men in their lives, whether fathers or husbands, had previously been. Married mothers often said they felt depressed living without their husbands in Mexico. Single mothers, in contrast, felt they could not find suitable husbands in their home communities due to their prior "failure" of having a child alone. They saw the United States as a place to start a new life, and meet men who might see beyond their reputations of being *pasada* or *masisa* or the ex-wife of someone else.

Thus the stakes are higher for transnational mothers in more than one way. Not only is their economic odyssey more desperate, but it involves a personal journey as well. Although Mexican transnational fathers are perhaps just as likely to seek personal fulfillment as mothers via migration, they did not describe it as such.

In the end, transnational fathers' migration decisions are congruent with the cultural constructs of the Mexican family, in which men seek to provide for their children. A history of migration to the United States has made family separation an honorable way of completing this goal.

When transnational mothers seek economic mobility by leaving children behind to migrate, however, they are challenging the cultural constructs of Mexican motherhood. Their personal interests in remarriage or in autonomy in their relationships with the men in their lives come in conflict with the expectation that they be the family caregivers. In short, mothers' migrations create dissonance between the migration narrative and the cultural constructs of the Mexican family.

I turn in the next chapter to an exploration of how congruence between cultural constructs and migration, in the case of fathers, and dissonance, in the case of mothers, shapes transnational parents' relationships with their children left behind.

Chapter 4

PARENTS

What are the expectations of parents embedded in the migration narrative? According to Robert C. Smith (2006), migration to the United States in Mexican transnational families involves an implicit "immigrant bargain": by leaving home mothers and fathers are expected to earn money to support their children while they are away. In turn, there is "the expectation that [this] sacrifice by the parents will be redeemed and validated through children's achievements" (p. 125). In Chapter 6, I look at the second half of the bargain, children's experiences at home while their parents are away. But what of parents' sacrifices? Here I explore how the interplay between parental expectations and post-migration experiences alters relationships with their children.

Three aspects of parents' expectation arising from their sacrifices during migration are key. First, according to Smith, the intergenerational bargain–or mutual expectation –between parents and children may not be unique to migrant families, but migration significantly ups the ante on the bargain, "making it an urgent tale of moral worth or failure" (2006:126). Second, expectations and moral evaluation are not only external, but also internal. In other words, just as a migrant father's children in Mexico expect that he will send remittances to support them from the United States, he expects this of himself and his self worth is tied to his ability to successfully do so. Finally, as discussed in the previous chapter, moral expectations of parents during migration arise, in part, from the cultural constructs of the Mexican family, namely the roles of mothers as family caregivers and fathers as family providers.

In what follows I draw on my interviews with parents and children to describe how internal and external moral expectations of mothers as caregivers and fathers as providers shape family separation. I analyze how these expectations may be important in three ways: (1) how parents' manage the process of leaving and returning home, (2) parents' efforts to stay in touch with their children from a distance, and (3) the risks physical separation poses to parent-child relationships. Fundamental differences in mothers' and fathers' migration strategies are, as I show, important in shaping relationships with children left behind. At the same time, geographic constraints create difficulties in communication that can strain parent-child relationships in similar ways for mothers and fathers. Nevertheless, even when mothers and fathers act in similar ways, their experiences post-migration are morally evaluated, both by parents and other members of the family, in very different ways. When Mexican mothers migrate, the consequences of family separation are distinct.

THE PROCESS OF LEAVING

The circumstances surrounding mothers' and fathers' migration decisions have important consequences for the relationships they have with children who remain in Mexico. In analyzing how migrant fathers, married couples, and single mothers manage the process of leaving, clear differences emerge in changes in routine and structure and the handling of comings and goings. These differences reveal the way gendered expectations not only affect parents' decisions to migrate, but also may shape relationships with children.

Routine and Structure

Most significant when a parent leaves home is the issue of stability. Furstenberg and Cherlin (1994) suggest that children need two things during the crisis period immediately following a divorce: an increase in emotional support and "structure provided by a reasonably predictable daily routine" (p. 66). International migration does not necessarily involve divorce, although it may, but it does entail the loss of one or both parents. As with children of divorce, structure and routine may help children in transnational families adjust to these changes. Yet children in different types of transnational families experience instability to markedly different degrees.

When fathers migrate without their wives and children, adjustments in the household are generally minimal. In many cases, children continue to live in the same homes, go to the same schools, and live with the same family members as before, with the exception of their absent fathers. In some families, a father's departure does lead to a change in the household, as mothers may move in with other relatives after a father migrates. Yet children continue to live with their mothers who can help to mitigate the effects of these moves. More importantly, since mothers generally do most of the carework for children in Mexico, daily routines such as the timing and type of meals, for example, change very little. According to one 15-year-old girl, who described herself as extremely distraught by her father's absence, the only major difference in her family life since her father left six years before (aside from longing for his return home) is in terms of family economics. "Before they administered the money together, my mom and my dad, and we didn't know anything about it. And now she tells me about the economic problems. Now I know more about my mother's problems." If anything, these minor

adjustments in routine and structure when fathers leave result in stronger bonds between mothers and children.

Adjustments are more substantial when mothers leave home. All else being equal, except in the few cases when children remained in the custody of ex-husbands after a divorce, the departure of mothers leaves children without either parent. Children may be more likely to feel abandoned when mothers leave than when fathers do simply because neither parent is left. Yet most mothers I met who joined husbands in the United States left their children in fairly stable home environments, almost always with grandparents. In many cases, children were living with substitute caregivers prior to mothers' departures, whether their father's family or, if their mother had moved back home when their father left, with maternal grandparents. When married couples are away, changes in family structure may not be as great as those to children's daily routines. When mothers leave, other family members prepare children's food, get them ready for school, and bathe them. Children, especially daughters, also may be expected to contribute more to housework (Orellana et al. 2001). As an example, when the mother of one 17-year-old joined her father in the United States, she and her three siblings moved to their grandmother's house. Having dropped out of school after ninth grade, she was the one to clean the house, take her younger siblings their lunches, wash their clothes, and do the dishes for the entire family. Not surprisingly, this young woman preferred living with her mother and explained, "It isn't the same [living with her grandparents]. We have small problems . . . It isn't the same type of affection. We don't feel the same as with our mother."

When married mothers migrate, children may experience more changes in their families than when only fathers leave. But the family circumstances for single mothers are often much more volatile. Divorced mothers may have problematic relationships with ex-husbands who have custody of their children. They may not have the full support of family members who may partly blame mothers for ending up alone. More importantly, single mothers have one family as a resource as opposed to couples who have two. When Nicandra's mother died, her boys started to live alone. And, when Paula's daughter Cindy decided she didn't want to live with her mother's cousins at age 16, she made arrangements to move to the city of Puebla and rent a room with family friends. In the event that problems arise in the child care arrangement, the consequences for children of single mothers can be disruptive.

Instability due to migration can be particularly hard when coupled with divorce, which statistics suggest may prompt single mothers' migration (see Kanaiaupuni 2000 and data presented in Chapter 2). This was true in the case of Osvaldo, Eric, and Edwin[21], ages 7, 8 and 11. When I interviewed the boys, they were living with an aunt in a town near San Angel, Oaxaca, but they were born and raised in Mexico City. Just two years earlier, their parents had divorced. When their mother found she was unable to support them on her salary as a secretary for a savings cooperative she left for California. At first the boys stayed with their maternal grandmother and aunts. All three had serious behavioral problems, and harsh discipline only exacerbated their misbehavior. When conflicts over their care ensued, they moved to rural Oaxaca with another aunt. Their cousin Faviola described 8-year-old Edwin as being the most traumatized by the changes in his family.

[21] Eric, Osvaldo, Edwin and their cousin Faviola are not members of a family constellation.

> They were very bad to him. When he arrived he would be crying, but while asleep, like he wouldn't know that he was crying. Sometimes his whole body would shake. And he would say "don't hit me, don't hit me." Oh, it was so bad it really shocked us . . . One time I was asleep and I don't know how he did it, but without me realizing it he got out of his bed and the mosquito netting and everything and I woke up to him sleeping on my pillow, hugging me and he was crying saying that he was scared.

While an improvement over life in Mexico City, the move to rural Oaxaca was also difficult for the boys. Eight-year-old Edwin, for example, said he didn't like the third grade although he did like school back in Mexico City. "Why don't you like it now?" I asked him.

"Because I don't like the other kids," he answered.

"Do you have friends?"

Edwin explained, "I have one . . . but it's that the girls say mean things to me."

Instability for the three boys continued. A month after I interviewed them, their mother sent for the oldest son, Eric. Once the school year ended, the two younger boys moved back to Mexico City. After a year, the other two joined their mother as well. Although the total time away from their mother was short, vast changes in living arrangements during this period made the lives of these young boys very chaotic.

Stability in structure and routine can vary greatly among individuals in each type of transnational family. Some children of single mothers lived in very stable home

environments, particularly when women had children as unmarried teenagers and raised them living with their own parents. And, stability in arrangements does not necessarily mean quality care. Yet for the most part, children in families in which fathers migrated had to make fewer adjustments as compared to those in which mothers migrated: when fathers leave, changes in family structure are more notable than changes in routines. When married mothers leave, because mothers are children's primary caregivers, children's routines change more drastically than family structure (since many stay with family members they had lived with prior to mother's migrations). And when single mothers leave, children generally must adjust to significant changes in both family structure and their daily routines.

Handling Departures and Visits Home

Mothers and fathers also differ significantly in how they manage the process of leaving and in their handling of departures and visits home.

First and foremost, the fathers I interviewed often reported that they left home without saying good-bye to their children. They generally said this was because they didn't want to upset the children. One father told me, "this time I had to hide in order to leave. I left really early when the kids were sleeping because my oldest girl didn't want me to leave." Another never told his children he was leaving. The first time he called from the United States, five months after leaving, his daughter still didn't know he was abroad. "She said 'where are you?' I answered, 'Working really far away.' She asked 'When will you be back?' I said 'I am far away, I don't know.' " That day he didn't tell his daughter where he was, but the next time he called, she knew where he was.

Fathers appear to avoid discussing their departures to make it easier to leave. According one father who had periodically been away from his 19 and 17-year-olds for 18 years, it was easier to leave his family when the children were little.

> The last two times I left, it has been really hard. Before, when the kids were little, they would go to bed at night and were sleeping when I left. This time, my son asked to take me to the bus terminal . . . I didn't want him to because it made me feel bad about leaving. And my daughter said to me "dad, you don't care that you are leaving us." I said to her, "I know you see my smiling face, but you don't know what is inside, what I am thinking and feeling."

Migrant fathers may avoid discussing their migration with their children because they do not want to get emotional in front of their children. It is also possible that they do not feel that an explanation is necessary. Since fathers leave children with mothers, they know someone is around to explain their departure after the fact. Moreover, they may not feel that their labor migration requires an extensive explanation since it does not deviate from the cultural construct of fathers' roles as family providers.

Unlike fathers, mothers, whether single or married, rarely left children without preparing them for their departure. A number of mothers introduced the idea of migration to children well in advance, and talked about how children supported their migration. When Nicandra returned home after her mother died, she included her children in the decision to return to the United States. "I said, 'Okay, now what do we do?' They said it was okay (to go back) because we needed the money." Another mother said, "I told them

a few months ahead of time that I was going to the United States to work with their father. The youngest boy said, 'it's okay mommy, go and work so that when you come back you can bring us a pizza.'" And, when one mother decided to join her husband abroad after he had been away for a year, she carefully explained her decision to her then four-year-old son. "What was it that he said? . . . Oh, he said that is was okay because I had been with him for a year already and he said, 'you should go now to be with my daddy because he is also very lonely over there.'" Whether because they typically leave home after fathers, have better communication with children, or because in leaving they deviate from cultural expectations of mothers as children's primary caregivers, mothers explained their departures carefully.

Second, many fathers engage in temporary, or seasonal, migration patterns. As such, many make regular trips to see their children in Mexico; 10 of 13 fathers who had visited their children had made return visits more than twice. Fathers often said their goal was to return home every winter, when work in the United States is slow. However, since all but one father I interviewed did not have legal status, return trips often varied according to fathers' economic situations. Some fathers waited until they had saved enough to take money home and to finance the return trip. One father said, "I like to go home with a lot of money to enjoy there." Others returned after bouts of loneliness. One father started the story of his last return trip with a weekend he called home drunk. His son answered and asked him to come home; he told the boy he couldn't because he hadn't saved up enough money yet. Then his daughter got on the line, "she said, dad, so it's true the money matters to you more than we do?" He said he was eaten up about it

after that day and couldn't decide what to do. "I went on a four day drinking binge and finally I said, fuck it, and I bought the plane ticket home."

While fathers often floated in and out of the lives of their children in Mexico depending on their work schedules and economic situation, mothers rarely did so. Of those I interviewed in New Jersey only Nicandra and Zelia resembled men in returning to visit their children for short periods of time. As described in Chapter 2, Mexican migrants view the border crossing as a much greater risk for women and mothers than for men. As a result, mothers preferred to work hard and save money while in the United States so they could reduce the total time they spent away from their children by either sending for their children, returning to Mexico for good, or going back to get their children.

The ways mothers and fathers manage comings and goings mean different things for children. For children in migrant father-only families, fathers who rarely discussed their departures and popped back into children's lives periodically often created anxiety around their migration. Children reacted differently to apprehension over fathers' migration. Some grew to resent fathers who communicated infrequently, generally mimicking the sentiments of their mothers. Others nervously awaited their fathers' return. In either case children's bonds with mothers grew stronger while fathers were away.

Angelo and Gabriela's four boys ages 7 through 11 all said they couldn't wait for their dad to come home when I interviewed them in October 2004. One night after Angelo's return home in January 2005, I visited the family and found the following scene (from my field notes):

> The TV, front and center, was set to a Mexican gossip show. Gabriela was perched on the sofa with the youngest boy asleep against her. Angelo and his three other sons were on the floor together playing an active game of cards. I have no idea what game they were playing, but it involved lots of laughter and throwing the cards down. They were absorbed when I arrived and not easily distracted.
>
> After the game dwindled, I asked Angelo if he planned to go back north soon. "Not yet," he said, "I don't know when I will be leaving." "Not tired of vacation yet?" I joked. He laughed, "No, not yet." "Soon" he added, "I might up and go. But, not yet." Gabriela directed her comment to me, "This is the way he always does it. Just one day to the next he decides that it is time to go back."

Gabriela's sons–who felt more emotionally close to their mother– were extremely anxious about when their father would return to the United States. One day when I saw Angelo and Gabriela's 10-year-old son Gilberto on the street, I asked how he felt with his father back in town. "Good," was all he said as he jumped off the step he was sitting on to face me.

When I asked him to explain, Gilberto said, "It is better with him here . . . because he drinks less here than he does there."

"How do you know he drinks a lot there?" I asked.

"Because then he calls us when he has been drinking and he has this voice, and, well, we just know that he has been drinking."

But when I asked Gilberto if he felt that his life was any different now that his father was back or whether things were the same when he was away, Gilberto shrugged his shoulders and answered, "It's the same." Thus while little in Gilberto's daily life changed when his father returned to visit, the ability to monitor his father's behavior, and know that his father was okay physically, was important to him.

When married couples migrate together, the dynamics between fathers and children are slightly different. As fathers often leave home first, children feel greater emotional attachment to their mothers. But, it is often fathers, not mothers, who make the trip back to see the children. As a result, children may feel their mothers' continued absence more poignantly. One migrant mother in New Jersey, for example, said her relationship with her eight-year-old daughter in Mexico deteriorated after her husband went home. Although he only visited for three weeks, it was enough for the girl to feel appreciated. Since she herself had not made a return visit, her daughter became increasingly resentful.

When mothers join husbands in the United States, fathers may assume responsibility for any back and forth visiting with children in Mexico. Single mother migrants do not have this option. They stay away and bide their time, save money, and develop necessary networks to be reunited with their children. However, unless their children live with combative ex-husbands, single mother's children generally better understand their mothers' reasons for leaving. This is often because many single mother migrants experienced desperate economic situations prior to migration, something that children, even at very young ages, are able to understand. For example, an eight-year-old

girl explained that her mother went to *el norte* "Because she was going to go work because my brother is sick and so that she can cure him and because my dad died."

Also, in cases where children were left too young to remember their generally unwed mothers, they almost always live with maternal grandparents who are quick to explain maternal absences to children. For example, Zelia's mother Doña Adelaida lauded her daughter's hard work in the United States.

> She has always been very responsible and she works two jobs . . . she used to work three jobs but stopped. I think she works in a factory or something like that. She usually sends money twice a month, like 1400 or 1600 pesos [$140-$160]. Oh, and she always sends clothes for the boy. When she came to visit she had a whole suitcase full of underpants and socks of different sizes for him.

Because single mothers are careful to prepare children for their absences, and children who don't remember their mothers live with supportive maternal kin, children of single migrant mothers understand the rationale behind their absences.

STAYING IN TOUCH

The expectations parents have of themselves to be either caregivers or providers influences the ways they manage their comings and goings during migration. Yet I found that once in the United States, mothers' and fathers' experiences converged in many ways. For one, their mechanics for staying in touch with children were remarkably

similar. Physical separation results in standardized mechanisms of transnational parenting.

Phone Conversations

The most common way both mothers and fathers maintain contact with their children in Mexico is by telephone. While almost all parents have somewhere they can call to, whether a home phone, a neighbor's home or more often a local *caseta*, not all have easy access to a phone in the United States. Many call from cell phones and others public pay phones. Nearly all use calling cards, which offer the best rates to Mexico. Numbers, however, often ring busy during peak calling times, usually on Sundays. Despite technical difficulties, most parents interviewed, regardless of gender, reported calling home once a week, fitting calls around work schedules, and gave a generic checklist of things they discuss with their children. They ask about school, how siblings are behaving and what things children want sent from the United States. I listened to Jose, father to Brian and Tina, when he called home one Saturday.

> Jose's son Brian is the first to answer the phone. Jose says hello and asks how Brian is. Then he asks when Brian will have his high school entrance exam–I assume he learns the date of the exam results, for Jose next asks, "What do you want me to get you, a stereo or a tape player?" They discuss the benefits of each and Jose concludes that a stereo is better and he will send that. He asks what else Brian would like as a gift before asking to speak to the boy's grandmother.

Mothers and fathers reported almost identical topics of conversations in their weekly calls home with sons and daughters. Typical conversations focus on the economic aspects of the parenting relationship and future migration plans. A mother of four said her children "tell me they are good and they ask me when I am going back there . . . they ask me for shoes, clothes, toys and money." A father told me, "My son asks me when I am going back and asks me to send him money." A mother said her six-year-old daughter says, "Take me north. I want to go north with you."

Another standard topic of phone conversations between parents and children is school progress. Parents, like Jose, ask about upcoming tests and urge children to work hard, at times offering material incentives, like a bicycle. One mother said that she sends her children money on special occasions to motivate them to do better in school. The only difference I found between mothers and fathers is that some fathers reported helping children with homework over the phone. For example, Angelo described his most recent conversation home to his wife and four boys. "My 7-year-old son had homework that he had to ask his dad if he played with marbles as a kid and we did this over the phone. (laugh) My son really couldn't understand me so then I had to tell my wife and she helped him with it later."

There is no gender-specific pattern regarding calls to sons versus daughters. Some fathers and mothers communicate more with daughters, some more with sons. For example, Armando said he spoke most with his nine-year-old son when he called home, and his ex-wife with their five-year-old daughter. Jose said he has better communication with his daughter, Tina, than his son, Brian, but when his ex-wife Elsa calls home, she speaks mostly with their son. A number of children of married migrant couples I

interviewed in Mexico reported talking more to their mother than their father, implying that it was the mother's duty to make weekly calls home to check on the children. However, interviews with couples in New Jersey showed that circumstances vary, and some fathers called their children more often than did mothers. For example, when I interviewed Nydia she called home more than her husband because she was on maternity leave but said that when she worked as a waitress, her husband called more often. Another mother said her two daughters, ages 10 and 6, get upset because she usually puts her husband on the phone. "The girls complain and say that I don't love them and that is why I always put their father on."

Children's versions of conversations with parents were surprisingly similar, and indicate that differences in conversations are dictated not by parent or child's gender, but by the child's age. The youngest children talk mostly about material goods and migration. A six-year-old boy said that when his mother, a widow who migrated two years before, calls, "I ask when she is coming and she says she is coming soon." A five-year-old girl who lived with her grandmother said that when she talks to her mom and dad on the phone they mostly discuss toys. She said she doesn't like to talk to them because "My mom says she is going to send for me." Another six-year old girl explained that her mother says "she is going to send clothes, a dresser, a bed and a mirror."

Older children verbalized their parents' concern with school performance and their behavior. An 11-year-old girl who lives with her maternal grandmother and siblings said, "My mom asks if I want something–I say yes–clothes, shoes, and school supplies. Then she tells me not to hit my little sisters because my sister tells her that I hit her. But I hit her because she hits the youngest one." Responses of boys were fairly similar. An

11-year-old boy said he and his mother discuss, “How I am doing in school and what she does there when she works and when she doesn’t work.” The oldest children described concerns for parents’ emotional well-being, saying they talk about the family news and give and receive advice from their parents. Nicandra’s son Miguel at age 16 recounted his daily conversations with his mother. “Well, we say hi, we ask how we are and if we have been to work or school. She asks me about my girlfriend . . . mostly, since I want to go there, that is what I always talk about with her conversation is about how hard life is there.” Fifteen-year-old Brian described conversations with father Jose as follows. “[We talk about] how he is. That he works harder there because there is a lot of things to do. I tell him to work harder because he has been there a long time and hasn’t done much and I tell him not to get discouraged that he can trust us and tell me anything.” At age 12 Brian’s sister, Tina, also described motivating her father. “He tells me about his job and that he wakes up early and a guy takes him to work where he stays all day. He tells me about the problems he has with his boss. I try to encourage him. I tell him to find another job but he says he is better there because it is stable.”

Of Gifts

Although phone conversations are filled with talk of gifts, parents said they preferred to send money, as it is expensive to send goods either through mail services or courier businesses. Most sporadically sent gifts with friends or relatives, or brought things back on their own trips home. A seasonal migrant for seven years, gave me the following list of items he takes his wife and four children whenever he returns: 1 pair of shoes each, 2-3 sets of clothing for each child, toys (almost always remote control cars for the boys), and an electronic item, once a TV, another time a VCR and most recently a

video camera. Another father said he collected random toys throughout the year to send to his 4-year-old son. As proof, he disappeared to his basement bedroom to retrieve a small teddy bear from his collection to give to my son. When I first met Elsa, Brian and Tina's mother, she was waiting on the front step for a man who was going to Puebla the following day. When he arrived she dragged a bag full of clothes outside. He smiled and asked, "Those are the pictures you are going to send?" but accepted the bag anyway.

In Mexico, families reported receiving mostly clothes, usually when friends or relatives came to visit. Children and grandparents often said parents get sizes wrong since they have been away so long. One grandmother gave me a pair of her grandson's almost new shoes for Temo; her daughter had sent them two sizes too small. Tina said her father sends "clothes, shoes, toys, because he still thinks I am a little girl and I like them." The 12-year-old rolled her eyes pointing to a row of Barbies on a shelf in the room. "But," she added, "my cousin likes to play with them."

Some children seemed embarrassed about the material aspect of their relationship with their parents. When I asked what kinds of things they want their parents to send them, they grew shy and simply answered I don't know. Tina said that she doesn't ask her father for much, "What I ask for he sends. But I try not to ask for much." When I asked a six-year-old if he asked his mom for toys, he answered defensively "Not me," causing his five-year-old sister to object and call him a liar. Children seemed aware that material objects are not equivalent to parental affection and some were wary of parents' use of gifts as replacements for time together. A 16-year-old complained that his absent father, now remarried, tried to employ material items to win him over when he came to

visit a few years ago. “When he came he brought us toys but he was here only a day or two. He wanted to buy us with the toys.”

Indeed, some children told me that those who show off gifts from the United States are looked down upon by their peers. According to one 15-year-old male, “some kids boast about the clothes that their parents send . . . this looks bad . . . they are teased for doing so. I never took the things my dad sent to school with me so I was never picked on.” Another young woman told me that as a child she repeatedly asked her migrant parent to send her a backpack for school, but when she finally received the gift, she was too ashamed to take it with her to school.

At the same time, children also recognized parents’ gifts as markers of love. One five-year-old girl boasted of her mother, “She said she was going to send me boots and there the boots are.” One 14-year-old girl who lives with her grandmother told me she doesn’t love either her mother or her father; her parents are divorced and both have remarried. She said she was most uncomfortable with her father who recently had tried to re-establish a relationship. When I interviewed the grandmother alone, she told me a story of a small jewelry box with a gold locket inside that the girl’s father recently sent.

> It was a small box. And we had just read in a book about a father who gave her daughter a small box, like that one, but it had nothing inside. Supposedly every time the girl opened the box, she would receive a kiss from her father. So [she] joked that the box her father sent her was like that; she would keep it in her dresser and open it when she wanted a kiss.

As this grandmother eloquently concluded, "[Gifts] make them [children] feel special and loved. But the gifts don't inspire love from children for their parents. They cannot bring trust and affection."

Money

While gifts are symbolically significant, money is the most important item both mothers and fathers send home. In New Jersey, mothers and fathers reported similar frequency of remittances: once or twice a month. However, parents were reluctant to disclose the amount of remittances, and were more sensitive about financial matters than their undocumented status, something other scholars of Mexican migration have noted (Cornelius 1982). Most mothers and fathers were vague or dismissed my questions about the amount of remittances by giving what seemed to be generic answers. While research suggests that women send less money home than men (Garza and Lowell 2002; Schmalzbauer 2004), and some have found women's remittances to be more regular than men's, among the parents I interviewed variations in reported remittances were greater among mothers and among fathers than between them.

Children were also vague in discussing monetary remittances. However, all children, even those of very young ages, understood the economic nature of their parents' migrations. A five-year-old girl said her parents went to the United States "because they are earning money there." An eight-year-old told me his mother migrated after his parents split up "because there we were going to have a different life and she was going to earn more money." A nine-year-old boy explained, "My dad is there so that he can send us money." I asked, "How much does he send?" The boy acknowledged, "I don't know."

Virtually all children responded similarly; they understood that their parents had migrated to support them, but few could tell me how much money their parents sent home and how often. Only three boys I interviewed actually received money directly; in one case this was Paula's son Mateo who received money directly when he started college in another city. In another case, Tony and Miguel received remittances directly from Nicandra, but only after their grandmother died.

Given the importance of money to the "immigrant bargain" –the plan that parents leave home in order to provide for their children financially–the reluctance of children and parents to describe the financial aspects of their relationship during periods of separation is interesting. It suggests their unwillingness to use remittances as a measure of the quality of their relationship once away. While symbolically money mattered perhaps more than anything else, parents and children resisted the definition of their relationship as purely economic in nature.

CHALLENGES WITH MIGRATION

A second way in which mothering and fathering converges post-migration is that mothers and father face similar challenges in maintaining relationships with their children over time. Even though mothers and fathers leave home for different reasons and leave different types of families behind, they occupy comparable positions as undocumented Mexican immigrants in the United States. Pressures that arise from life as a migrant may affect both mothers' and fathers' abilities to fulfill obligations to children back at home.

Economics

Despite mothers' different motivations for migration, both mothers and fathers expect to work in the United States. Parents, however, often do not anticipate the difficulties they will face in doing so. During the holiday season in San Angel, return migrants sported fancy clothes, brought nice gifts for their relatives, and invited friends and others to parties and on outings. Few residents of San Angel I met knew that these same migrants were rarely so extravagant in the United States. Not having lived as minority immigrant workers in the United States, they did not understand the psychological importance for return migrants of saving enough money to be able to come back to show off their economic prosperity. Residents of San Angel also did not necessarily see what U.S. migrants did when their money ran out; they did not learn about what working and living conditions of U.S. migrants were like until they went abroad themselves. During presentations at regional middle and high schools, students' mouths gaped when I described the living conditions in New Jersey of many migrants who often rent beds in unfurnished basements, sleep on sofas, or share a bed with others working alternate shifts to cut living costs. Since a number of migrant success stories floated around the community, people in San Angel thought that anyone who works hard in *el norte* can be successful (see also Schmalzbauer 2005b). They generally believed that those who didn't send money home regularly were lazy or spent their money on vices such as alcohol or drugs.

Upon arrival in the United States, migrants face a stark reality. Work is not always easy to obtain and is often erratic. None of those I interviewed arrived with legal permission to work in the United States. In New Jersey, many Mexican migrants start off by finding jobs through temporary agencies (Ortega 2006), jobs that are inherently

unstable. Even when migrants obtain a job directly with employers, work is often sporadic. Many of the factories where Mexican women work increase and decrease production or shipping throughout the year, especially around the holiday seasons. Factories usually hire some regulars and depend on a floating labor force that has no benefits and no job security. One mother I interviewed had a steady job for over two years at a factory, but was fired when a family member was diagnosed with HIV and she took off too much time to care for him. Ever since, she has floated from job to job, and bakes Mexican sweet bread and makes *tamales* to sell to her friends when she cannot find work. Work also may be sporadic in construction and landscaping, common jobs for Mexican men in Central New Jersey. The construction and landscaping season generally runs from April to October. While work is plentiful during the summer, and some work up to 60 hours a week at $10-$15 per hour, when it rains and once it gets cold there is no work. Only some are able to make arrangements with their bosses for year round work. Otherwise, migrant men must learn to stretch savings into the spring. Their hopes often rest on a winter full of snow so they can do snow removal, which provides a well paid, albeit temporary, fix to lack of employment during the winter.

As a result, many migrants must adjust their economic goals after they arrive in the United States. Jose, who has worked steadily at a pizzeria for over three years, explained, “My plan initially was to stay here for two, maybe three years, in order to save enough money just to fix up my house. I calculated pretty carefully that it would take me this long to earn the money I needed.” Surprised that he knew how much he would make before coming to the United States, Jose explained, “Well, [I didn’t know] exactly (pause). But, based on what they told me people earn, I thought I would work

approximately this many hours a week at this salary and I thought it would take me two years to reach my goal." Already past the two-year mark when I first met Jose, he wasn't sure when he would be able to go back. He had made little progress towards his original goals.

Mexican workers rarely anticipate that health problems, coupled with lack of health insurance, may affect their ability to work full time. One mother, for example, stopped working when she had a kidney stone operation. A number of other women left work during their pregnancies. Nydia found she couldn't stay on her feet all day as a waitress after her fifth month of pregnancy. Many women were not aware of labor laws and quit before asking employers for easier tasks. Other employers, as in Nydia's case, refused to make accommodations.

Typical jobs for Mexican men require even better physical conditioning. Armando, for example, had health problems when he first arrived in the United States and landed a job in landscaping with his brothers. He explained, "I didn't think it would be so hard here. My brother gave me the impression that there was money to be made everywhere . . . I first worked mowing lawns. But I didn't last because my health wasn't good when I got here . . . I couldn't last at that job. Instead I went to work in a factory." As factory work pays less than landscaping, the move meant a lower salary than Armando had originally anticipated.

Additionally, many men cannot work when they are hurt in accidents. I met one father when his brother asked me to translate at a doctor's appointment necessary to file a worker's compensation complaint after he fell and hurt his arm at the paint factory where he worked. It was actually his second accident: a few years earlier the same machine

almost severed his arm. Mexicans have the highest death rates from work-related accidents of all other ethnic or racial groups in the United States and are 80 percent more likely to die from work-related accidents than are members of native-born groups (Pritchard 2004).

Not all accidents arise from work. Nydia complained that her husband had no vices except for basketball, but had been out of work for two months after spraining an ankle on the court. When Laura's husband Enrique migrated, she didn't hear from him for an entire year. She was forced to go to work at a bar and even considered leaving the couple's five children to work in the United States. "We all knew he was going to work. But, we didn't have any news from him. It was a lack of communication. We thought bad of him–we all thought that he had another woman there." She finally found out that he was injured during a fight; recovery from a stab wound took a number of months during which time he was unable to work and he was too ashamed to call home without being able to send money.

Experiences of economic difficulty as low wage workers may frustrate migrant parents' ability to accomplish their goal of sacrificing themselves for the sake of their children left back in Mexico. It is for this reason, perhaps, that once in the United States parents and children are reluctant to talk about their relationship in terms of the dollar amounts of money sent home. The expectation that parents will send money home, however, is constant. Likewise, the tension between this expectation and their ability to fulfill it is pervasive.

Marital Estrangement

Marital discord among immigrant families in the United States is common, as couples find they must adjust their relationships to the changing context of living as minorities in the United States (Kibria 1993; Min 1998; Smith 2006). Recent evidence also suggests that rates of marital dissolution may be higher among migrants than their non-migrant counterparts (Frank 2005b). Consistent with other research, marital discord was fairly common among those I interviewed, but it did not necessarily prevent migrants from communicating with their children in Mexico. Despite widespread rumors of abandonment, discussed further in Chapter 9, most parents I spoke with maintained fairly regular contact with their children even when they were engaged in new relationships in the United States. Among the few who did not maintain regular contact with children, all were divorced or separated. In severe cases of marital estrangement, problems with an ex-spouse could severely curtail a migrant parent's contact with his or her children in Mexico.

Communication with children was especially difficult for single mother migrants who contended with confrontational ex-husbands. One mother, for example, left home when she found out her husband was living with another woman. For three years she had little contact with her three boys; she only occasionally spoke to the oldest when a neighbor helped arrange it. Another was not able talk to her two children living with her ex-husband, who was re-married, and he would not accept the gifts that she sent them. She was infuriated when she learned that the children were selling candy. "When I was there we were poor, but at least they weren't out on the streets." One mother whose 14-year-old lived with her ex husband, was at first excited that I would be going to Mexico; I could take a ring for her daughter's 15th birthday. A month later I went to arrange the

visit, but she scowled when I mentioned her daughter. “I am not going to send her anything,” she told me. “She doesn’t deserve it. She is rebelling.” When I asked what she meant by rebelling, she explained, “She won’t talk to me when I call. She is too close to her father. When she gets on the phone, she says she has to go because her father doesn’t like her talking to me.”

Unlike mothers, some fathers I met had new partners in the United States even though they were still married in Mexico. They continued to be as involved in their children’s lives as their faithful counterparts, calling home weekly, or monthly, and sending money home regularly. Fathers who were estranged from children in Mexico, like mothers, reported animosity in their break-ups with the mother of their children. One father, for example, told me he never talks to his daughter and doesn’t know where she is although he has been paying $62 a week for child support for over five years. He was clearly upset in telling the story of his daughter and in describing how much he loves her. When his daughter was nine months old, he and his wife separated. For the next four months he visited his daughter weekly and then one day, she wasn’t there. At first they told him she was asleep and on the next visit that she was at the park. Two weeks later, a family member told him his wife had sent the girl back to Mexico. He recounted resentfully, “supposedly she sent her away because of the man she had here; he didn’t like the girl. She chose him instead of the girl. And, now she says that I will never see her and that she is never going to stop suing me for child support.”

In the end only a few mothers and fathers I interviewed had lost touch with their children in Mexico. All who did experienced extreme levels of conflict with their ex-spouses, which affected their ability to communicate with their children post-migration.

However, the threat that tenuous marital relationships would affect parents' relationships with children was omnipresent. Rumors of fathers' and or mothers' remittances and gifts being rejected by aggrieved ex-spouses were common. Such rumors were particularly upsetting to parents because they potentially thwarted migrants' efforts to demonstrate to children that they continued to care and provide for them albeit from a distance. Over time, migrants must negotiate marital relationships in order to prevent the low levels of discord that arise during migration from becoming explosive and disrupting relationships with children left in their country of origin.

Competition

The birth of children in the United States is another factor that can affect parents' relationships with their children they have left behind. Whether born of the same marriage or a new one, migrant mothers and fathers consider sibling jealously to be a potential source of conflict. One father, for example, wondered out loud whether his two children in Mexico would accept his newborn son, but then decided "they are young enough to grow attached to him." Another explained that his daughters in Mexico are also jealous of his U.S. born child, "Once one of the girls asked me to go home because if I don't I am going to love the one that was born here more than them." A mother who joined her husband two years earlier, left two daughters with her sister-in-law and since had a baby boy in the United States. She complained that on the phone "the girls reproach me. They are jealous, extremely jealous, the younger one more than the older one."

Children in Mexico described U.S. born children as a potential threat, although they often accepted them. Mostly, young children fear that these U.S. born siblings or half-siblings will compete more successfully for their parents' love and attention since

they live with the parents. One 11-year-old's migrant mother had a baby in New York City. Her mother had brought the baby sister back to Mexico to live with the children's grandmother and subsequently returned to the United States. When I asked if she thought her mother loved her, she answered, "Sometimes I think my mom loves my little sister more because she was born there with her. I feel like she gives her more love. When she [sister] arrived I didn't like her." Sixteen-year-old Brian told me, "I don't understand – it is so ignorant [that he has a child in the United States], if he [father] cannot make it with us, how can he with another one." In effect, U.S. born children not only compete for scare parental resources, but they also negate the sacrificial aspect of separation as a migration strategy.

Interviews with some parents indicate that children's fears are not unfounded. For mothers, the pain of separation can be so great that having a new child in the United States is what most relieves them. According to one mother, who has a daughter in Mexico and two U.S. born children, "It is like you carry the weight of all the love that you have been holding in and then you put on them [U.S. born children]." Fathers are often much more involved with the care of U.S. born children due to a greater propensity to share child care when both partners work in the United States and also because many of them had migrated while their Mexican-born children were still young (see also Levitt 2001). A father who returned to San Angel with his U.S. born daughter and his wife to be reunited with the couple's oldest son, said his son is not close to him and thinks that he loves his daughter more. The father insisted he loves his son, but he admitted that it is not the same. "I also feel different. I raised my daughter since she was born. I bathed her, I

changed her diapers, I prepared her bottles. I never did that for my son because I was away working in the north when he was little."

Over time, the likelihood increases that children born in the United States, marital conflict and economic hardship will undermine parents' efforts to maintain relationships with children at home via phone calls, gifts and monetary support. Moreover, with the simple passage of time, parents may struggle to keep memories alive, particularly when they have left very young children at home. A surprising number of fathers (10) left pregnant wives and subsequently did not know their youngest children until they visited home. One father explained, "In fact, she didn't even tell me about the baby until I had arrived here because she didn't want me to worry." Many mothers have a similar problem because they left infants. One mother told me that her husband is closer to their daughter because he had been back to visit. In contrast, "she [her daughter] doesn't know me . . . She doesn't remember me. She was little when I left." The longer parents are away from children in Mexico, the expectation that parents will successfully sacrifice themselves for the sake of their children becomes harder to fulfill.

INTERPRETING PARENTAL SACRIFICE

Given the different ways mothers and fathers managed separation from children, it is surprising that families reported almost identical patterns in the mechanics of transnational parenting for both mothers and fathers. Mothers and fathers used the same means of communication and both described similar sources of risk in their ability to fulfill expectations of parental sacrifice over time. To be sure, there are some important

differences in mothers' and fathers' experiences as transnational parents. For example, fathers reported helping children with homework whereas mothers did not. Fathers also often had romantic relationships in the United States without disrupting their relationships with wives and children in Mexico, a pattern not found among mothers. Families also described alcohol consumption to be a more common problem for Mexican fathers than for Mexican mothers (see also Smith 2006). However, despite the popular belief that depression leads migrants in general, and Mexican men specifically, to drink, recent research suggests that alcoholism is less common among foreign born Mexican Americans than their U.S. born counterparts and among Mexican born non-immigrants (Borges et al. 2006; Grant et al. 2004).

Thus for the most part, gender differences in the mechanics of managing separation from children seem to be minimal. At face value, we might conclude that the geographic and technical challenges of parenting from abroad neutralize gender distinctions in Mexican families. Yet there were very important differences in the meaning attached to migrant parents' experiences after migration. Similar actions were interpreted by both children and parents in Mexican transnational families through a gendered lens in which fathers were expected to provide and mothers were expected to be caregivers.

Emotions Underlying Parents' Expectations

Fathers had extremely high expectations of their own labor migration. When they perceived failure, communication with their children at home waned. When fathers felt they could not fulfill their roles as family providers in terms of sending money home, their contact with their children decreased. One father, for example, said, "I only call

when I have a number to give them [for the money order].” If not, he won’t call. Another explained, “I call home more when I have money. Right now since I am not really working much, I haven’t sent any.” A father may not send money because of lack of employment or because he drinks away his paycheck. However, what is important here is not the act of drinking or not working, but the act of sending money that matters most to him.

Salvador[22], a husband and father of two teenagers said he visits his family in Oaxaca every year and calls home weekly. Salvador first migrated to New York City when his oldest son, now 19, was one year old. On his second trip to New York he got involved with a Puerto Rican woman and moved in with her, but never told his family in Mexico about her. The relationship ended after six months when Salvador hit her and ended up in jail for three months. From my fieldnotes:

> While in jail, he had a friend send money home in his place - - - $200 a month lying to his family saying that there wasn’t much work at that time of the year. Salvador laughs as he recounts how his friend would call home for him, saying he couldn’t call personally because he was working somewhere in the mountains where there wasn’t a phone line. To this day, Salvador’s family doesn’t know about his incarceration or the Puerto Rican woman behind it.

As long as Salvador and others like him are able to provide financially for family in Mexico, their role as fathers remains intact. One father continues to call his wife and four children whenever he had money, even after 10 years of binge drinking in the U.S.

[22] Salvador is not a member of a family constellation.

and an alleged affair with his sister-in-law. Remarkable is that he still considers himself the household head. Clearly fathers' relationships with families are often troubled. Still, migrant fathers make it clear that when they send money home they feel their prerogatives as the head of the household are maintained.

Mothers' relationships with children are not dependent on financial support. The emotional care work they are able to perform from a distance matters most to mothers. Before one single migrant mother sent for her children, for example, she spoke with them weekly. Every time she called, her eight-year-old daughter would say, "Mommy, when are you coming back to be with us. I want you to be here with me already." This mother did not, however, send money home regularly, and explained the financial relationship she had with her sister, who cared for the children, as follows:

> I trust her because we help each other out. I send money when I can, but sometimes when I don't work for two or three weeks, I don't send any and she feeds the children. And, sometimes if she doesn't have any money and needs it she will call me and ask, and I try to send something.

Whether or not she sent money home did not affect how she related to her children. In fact, I found that 10 mothers were not working when I interviewed them, some because of new child care responsibilities and others because they were frequently out of work. All remained in touch with their children and did not consider lack of employment as an impediment to the relationship.

If financial support isn't essential to mothers, emotional intimacy is. Transnational mothers expect that they, and other mothers in their situation, will call home regularly and suffer greatly without their children. Fathers generally minimized the emotional costs of family separation despite evidence of substance abuse, depression, and feelings of loss living without their children, perhaps owing to men's efforts to distance themselves from what Riessman (1990) calls direct manifestations of sadness (p. 155). In contrast, 14 mothers detailed how they cried for months upon arrival in the United States, lacked appetite and became physically ill, or grew severely depressed. For example, one mother told me, "I cried for two months when I first arrived . . . I was nervous all the time, and made lots of mistakes when I first started to work." Another complained that before her husband went back for her son "I didn't work well. I didn't sleep well. I didn't eat well." One mother in San Angel told me she returned to Mexico, because, "I suffered a lot in the United States without my son, especially when we had first arrived. When we would go out to the stores and I saw the children with their parents, I would start to cry." These symptoms are similar to those reported in the general literature on mothers who are separated from their children for other reasons, including incarceration, institutionalization due to mental illness, or homelessness (Schen 2005).

Mothers often expressed guilt over leaving children, whereas fathers rarely did. A father of three who calls and sends money weekly to his children living in three different households, one with his ex-wife, one with his mother and one with his current spouse, explained when I asked if he feels guilty for not living with his children. "No, it is not guilt. I think I would feel bad if I knew the children were suffering, and that they wouldn't suffer if I was there with them. But they aren't, so I don't." Compare his

comment to that of Nicandra, whose teenage sons Tony and Miguel actually live in the same neighborhood as her ex-husband, and are supported by her weekly remittances. “I often feel guilty. When things aren’t going well I feel guilty. When my son wasn’t doing well, it was like I wasn’t on top of things. I mean, one feels guilty for not giving them the attention they need.” Nicandra feels her children’s emotional well being is her responsibility, even though their father lives nearby. The father of three, on the other hand, considers his responsibility to be for children’s economic well-being. His children suffer less, economically, because he works abroad and sends money home regularly, making his sacrifice guilt free.

Mexican transnational parents do not abandon the cultural construct of mothers as caregivers and fathers as providers when living apart from their children. Despite vast changes in the circumstances in which they live, migrant parents clung to gendered expectations of parenthood, perceiving failure to sacrifice themselves for their children according to moral expectations of Mexican motherhood and fatherhood.

Children’s Evaluations of Mothers’ and Fathers’ Sacrifices

If mothers are more important to Mexican children than fathers, one might expect that children of migrant mothers would miss their mothers much more than children of migrant fathers. For example, Salazar Parreñas (2005) found that Filipino children with migrant fathers were ambivalent about their fathers’ absence; in contrast their mothers’ absences had long-term emotional effects. Some have suggested that fathers’ migration is also produces an ambivalent reaction in Mexican children (Aguilera-Guzman et al. 2004). However, my interviews with Mexican children in migrant father-only families showed that most children wanted to live with their fathers and wanted them to come home. A

14-year-old girl said she feels sad when she hangs up from her weekly calls to her father "because it isn't the same to talk on the phone than to have him close." What she misses about her father is "his personality. How he was with us . . . He is very loving with us. He pays a lot of attention to us." One of only two children who cried during the interview said that the hardest thing is feeling that she is missing her father's love. This 16-year-old's message to migrant fathers was "That they try to fight here in Mexico. That they don't go there. That the affection of their children is not something you can pay for with money."

Not all children were as kind to migrant fathers; some were very resentful of their absences. But such resentment demonstrates acknowledgment by almost all children that a father should be there for his children and his family. Even a 12-year-old boy who told me that he doesn't like to talk on the phone to his father and that he is better off with his mother because his father hit him said he misses his father. He said, "I remember that he gets angry a lot" and that "it is better that he is there . . . it is better to live with my mom." But he also admitted, "well, yes, sometimes I do want him to come back." I asked the 12-year-old, "What makes you miss your father?" and he replied, "It is just that he is far away and he cannot come back." In line with other findings in research with children (Galinsky 1999), fathers' role in the family is perhaps more important to children than popular culture suggests. Or, perhaps, the experience of living apart makes children more appreciative of their fathers' role in the family.

While most children of migrant fathers missed them greatly, among children of migrant couples, the majority felt that mothers were indeed the most important. Half the children I interviewed with both parents away reported much closer relationships with

mothers than fathers. They described greater *confianza*, trust, and *cariño*, love, with their migrant mothers. This was true of children of all ages and of both girls and boys. Although at age 11 German explained that he felt the same amount of *cariño* for both his mother and his father, he told me he was closer to his mother because she calls him more often. German's logic illustrates how love from each parent comes on different terms.

> *JD:* Do you love your mom?
>
> Yes.
>
> *JD:* Do you feel that she loves you?
>
> She says she loves me.
>
> *JD:* And your dad, do you love him also?
>
> Yes.
>
> *JD:* So you feel that he loves you?
>
> Yes, well, he is the one who sends more money.

German described his mother's love as expressed in words and his father's love as expressed in dollars, or pesos.

Children often had higher expectations for their migrant mothers than their migrant fathers. An 11-year old girl (cited earlier for feeling like her mother didn't love her because of her U.S. born sister) said she didn't feel like her sister jeopardized her relationship with her father, even though he had lived with her mother and sister in New York. Her father had recently returned to San Angel and married another woman, but she is prohibited from seeing him by her maternal grandmother. She does see her father,

though, “When I go by after school he talks to me and he gives me money . . . 15 or 20 pesos ($1.50-$2.00).” The small amount was enough to show the 11-year-old that her father cared. Although her mother, who lives thousands of miles away, supports her economically and calls once a week, it doesn’t appear to be enough. She admitted that at times, “I want to go and live with him [her father].”

The gendered double standard for migrant parents means that children often feel more distraught about their mothers’ absences, as Brian’s experiences illustrate. Brian told me that he felt like his mother had abandoned him after his parents divorced post migration, “Because if she loved us really, she would call. Or not even, that she doesn’t send (money), because that doesn’t matter. But at least she has to call.” What mattered to Brian was not the money, but “That she calls and says that she is okay.” In contrast, Brian said he loves his father. When I asked, “Do you feel like your dad loves you?” Brian answered, “Sometimes I say that no, but well yes. He is the only one who supports us.”

When children view fathers’ sacrifice as dependent on financial responsibility whereas mothers’ sacrifice is tied to demonstrating emotional care from a distance, they often feel more disappointed with their mothers over time. Mothers’ failures to live up to standards of care during periods of international separation are emotionally distressing for Mexican children, and explain why research in Mexico finds higher levels of stress related to mothers’ migration (Aguilera et al. 2004).

THE SALIENCE OF GENDER

The salience of gender in transnational families is crucial to understanding the ways expectations of mothering and fathering evolve during periods of separation.

Economic expectations are more important for fathers than for their children or for transnational mothers. Emotional considerations are bedrock for mothers and their children. Gendered interpretations of parental sacrifice during periods of international separation shape parents' and children's relationships over time, particularly considering that mothers' work in the home carries a significant moral dimension in comparison to fathers' work outside the home (see Ahlander and Bahr 1995).

Fathers who abandon their children do so when they have trouble providing for them financially. Given that working conditions for Mexican migrants in the United States are often difficult, economic considerations are not inconsequential. None of the fathers I interviewed earned more than $15 per hour. Many worked two jobs or an average of 60-70 hours a week. Mexican fathers face significant pressures in supporting their families in Mexico, and constantly compare themselves to other migrant men's achievements. Fathers expect to build a house, start a new business and increase the family's standard of living through remittances. The emphasis on economic provision inherent in labor migration reinforces the male role as honorable family provider when separated from children. Ironically, fathers expressed a greater interest in their children's lives post-migration. As one father claimed, "the problem is that for many of us fathers, we value them more when we aren't there. When you are there, you put less importance on them." Moreover, it is only when migrant mothers distance themselves from children back in Mexico after a marital break-up in the United States that fathers feel entitled to further develop relationships with children in Mexico. Regardless, the economic relationship is paramount, for fathers only communicate with children in Mexico as long as they are sending money home.

Mothers, in contrast, do not expect themselves, or other mothers, to perform economic miracles with remittances. Instead, they either hope to find work to put food on the table or assist husbands in their goals. Mothers do expect themselves to be able to maintain significant emotional bonds with their children despite the distance. When mothers have competing demands for their affections and lose touch with their families' lives in Mexico, they feel their relationships with their children suffer. One mother I met, for example, never sent money home regularly but spoke with her two boys in Mexico often, even after she divorced their father. However, once she remarried and started a new family, her regular phone calls stopped. Another had not reduced economic support for her eight-year-old daughter over the six years she lived with her husband in New Brunswick. Her phone calls, and intimacy with her daughter, however, waned as her U.S.-born children began to occupy her time.

It is important to note that mothers do use material objects as expressions of care, an act akin to father's economic provision of goods. For this reason mothers, like fathers, send children gifts through friends and talk on the phone about what children want or need. However, when mothers do not send money or gifts they do not necessarily feel they have damaged their relationships with their children. What matters is the expression of care, rather than actual material goods. For fathers, in contrast, it is what is sent home that counts.

Children, like their parents, understand the social construction of Mexican motherhood and fatherhood, even at very early ages. Children expect fathers to send money for their care. From mothers, signs of emotional intimacy are what count most. Ironically, when fathers migrate children become more aware of the emotional value of

fathers in their families. Significantly, this means that migration creates the opportunity for Mexican fathers to enhance their caregiving roles in their children's lives.

Over time, the consequences of the meaning ascribed to mothers' and fathers' absences become apparent. Motherly displays of care from a distance are intangible, unlike monetary expressions of fatherly provisions which are countable in pesos. Although often sporadic, fathers' opportunities to sustain transnational relationships with their children in Mexico via remittances are ongoing. Whenever they are gainfully employed and send money home, they have a claim to fatherhood. In contrast, mothers' intangible expressions of care more easily fade with time as it is nearly impossible to reclaim their role of caring mother after long periods of inattention. As a result, transnational mothers race against a clock. They must work hard and resolve the physical separation as quickly as possible. I was often surprised at how fluid Mexican transnational arrangements were, especially for mothers. Unlike the Filipino cases, with mothers and children being separated for most of childhood, from 10 to 20 years (Salazar-Parreñas 2005), the longest time a mother I interviewed was separated from her children was eight years. This compares to one father who has been a seasonal migrant for close to 40 years, and 7 others who had worked in the United States for at least 10 years.

In summary, in some ways, physical separation is a gender equalizer in transnational families. International migration limits the type of contact mothers and fathers can have with their children, for mothers cannot be directly involved in routine care work, and both parents rely on the same means of communication from a distance. In addition, the nature of the marital relationship is key to determining parents' migration

decisions and also whether or not parents' abandon their children during periods of international separation. This finding corroborates research in the United States, which shows mothers as mediating children's relationships with non-residential fathers (Dunn et al. 2004; Edin and Lein 1997; Furstenberg and Cherlin 1994). It appears that international separation magnifies the influence of the marital relationship on parent-child relationships; it matters not only for fathers after divorce, but also for migrant mothers with children in Mexico and members of intact families.

The conditions of migration may put women and men on similar playing fields and alter Mexican gender expectations within marital relationships (Hondageu-Sotelo 1994, Hirsch 2003). Yet like Salazar-Parreñas (2005), I find that gender expectations in parenting are quite durable in the transnational context. The immigrant bargain that Smith (2006) describes as underlying parental migration in Mexican transnational communities is fundamentally different for mothers and fathers. Fathers' relationships with their children are directly related to their ability to honorably fulfill the role of economic provider for the family, especially as compared to other migrant men. International migration magnifies the economic role of men in families, as monetary support becomes the most meaningful tie to their children in Mexico. Mothers, in contrast, work hard to demonstrate emotional intimacy with their children, albeit from a distance. They cling to models of moral mothering, as do their children, even when migration makes it increasingly difficult, especially over time, for mothers to uphold these ideals. In the end, mothers carry the moral burden of transnational parenting.

Chapter 5

ARMANDO LOPEZ: FATHERHOOD

What happens when couples divorce post-migration? Are mothers still expected to be caregivers and fathers to be providers? I found that in most cases when parents migrated together (leaving children behind) and then divorced, it was fathers who took a more active role in the lives of children left behind. Mothers, in contrast, tended to fade from the scene. This suggests that when parents divorce after they migrate, new opportunities arise for fathers to redefine their relationships with children in Mexico. This happened for Armando Lopez, who explained how his children reacted to his migration:

> When I first came [to the United States], it was like they didn't miss me that much. I felt this, anyway, I think because their mother was there [in Mexico] and they felt secure with their mother. They didn't need anything. But when she recently came [to the United States and then left him], I saw that they got closer to me, it was as if–like they were very stuck to their mother. When she was there, they were attached to her. She was like their idol.

Post-migration and after leaving her husband for another man, Armando's ex-wife had violated the standard of care expected of mothers. In this case, the failure to live up to the moral burden of transnational motherhood created new possibilities for fatherhood.

This chapter explores through one in-depth case study how marital conflict during migration can spill over into parents' relationships with their children in Mexico and

affect the gender expectations within families. When I first interviewed Armando in New Jersey, he said he felt quite depressed at his wife's betrayal of him and the separation from his children. The role of caring father was something Armando was more than willing to strive to fulfill, for it gave meaning to his life after the marital break-up. This honorable father sought redemption in adopting self-sacrificing ideals generally reserved for mothers.

Yet as I followed Armando and his family's experiences after he returned to live with his children in Mexico, it became clear that despite Armando's initial resolve to radically deepen his relationship with his children, he and his wife could not escape their gender roles. Armando's story reveals that even when divorce after migration shakes up parents' lives, the expectation that fathers will be provides and mothers caregivers, remains paramount.

MARTIAL WOES

One day a mutual friend told me about Armando, who had revealed to her a recent separation from his wife and his children in Mexico. When I called, he immediately agreed to an interview. As he lived just blocks from my house, I walked over the next day and was greeted by a young woman holding a baby, who I later learned was Armando's only sister. She invited me into the first floor apartment and the door opened into a sparely decorated, spotless living room. The rose-colored carpet seemed to be recently vacuumed; the gray sofa and love seat set, as well as the coffee table, were free of clutter. Armando joined us immediately, dressed in baggy jeans, a stylish T-shirt and a baseball cap. Armando, I learned, is the second oldest of six brothers and one sister. He was living

with one of his brothers, his sister, her husband and their newborn baby. Armando's three other brothers rented the second floor apartment, where they lived with their respective partners. Only one brother still lives in the family home in Mexico. I had entered a home filled with Armando's relatives.

Armando is a soft-spoken man, who was deliberate and thoughtful when he talked about his life. He was one of the few who agreed to being taped recorded during our interview. At the time of our first conversation, Armando had been separated from his wife for six months. The couple had three children, nine-year-old Michael, five-year-old Mary and three-year-old Lupe, who lived with Armando's mother outside of a major Mexican city.

Armando started by explaining that he had finished high school in Mexico and was licensed as an electrician. When he graduated and began to look for work, he found that the jobs paid at less than $100 per week. "Since my family was very poor and my older brother had already married, I felt responsible for the family. And the money wasn't enough."

So Armando joined the Marines. He worked as an electrician on naval ships traveling from port to port within Mexico. However, Armando did not like life at sea and after four years he left the Marines and returned home. At age 24, Armando started working as an electrician at the local hotels, a booming industry. When he was 29, Armando decided it was time to get married. His bride was more than ten years younger, and, looking back, he considered the generation gap to be partly responsible for their separation. Armando had just turned 40 when we met.

After a civil ceremony, Armando and his bride moved in with Armando's mother. The couple's first son, Michael, was born in 1995. After two years, Armando bought a property just a few blocks from his mother's home. He built a wooden house and moved his small family into the new home. Mary was born in 1999. In 2001, Armando's brother invited him north.

Armando thought hard about his decision to migrate and was reluctant to leave home. A few years earlier another he had turned down an offer from another brother to help him migrate. "I thought about it a lot. I didn't want to leave my family. I was happy with my family. But my wife and I decided that I would come. The idea was to save money. To save. I didn't think I would stay for long, that or I would bring my family [here] . . . I wasn't crazy about the idea, but I talked to my wife about it and she convinced me it would be good idea so that we could fix up the house and save money as well. So I decided to go."

When Armando left, his wife was pregnant with their third child. She did not tell him she was pregnant until he had arrived in the United States so as not to worry him. Little Lupe was born in 2001. Armando explained, "I have never met her, only in pictures and videos."

Armando did not expect that life would be difficult in the United States. "My brother gave me the impression that the money hung on the trees here." His brothers found him his first job cutting grass for a landscaping company. But, Armando's health was not so good when he arrived. "I didn't last at that job. Instead I went to work in a factory." At the time of our interview, he still worked at a factory. Armando's health had

improved, though the illness remained unnamed. He worked the early morning shift and was home by 4 PM to go to another part time job in the evenings.

After a year in the United States, Armando paid off the loan that had financed his migration. There were also a number of debts at home arising from the birth of his youngest daughter at the hospital (since he had been away when she was born and no longer had health insurance to cover the medical costs). He sent $80 - $100 a week but felt like he was spinning his wheels. “A year went by and I did nothing. By the second year, I thought about bringing my children here. I thought that here there would be a better future for them . . . Children suffer in Mexico. There is a lot of insecurity [there]. People are bad over there. And nutrition is bad as well. There is less distrust [here]. There is less insecurity.”

During Armando’s second year away from home, he proposed the idea of coming to the United States to his family in Mexico. “My wife, she wanted to come. My son didn’t want to come, because of his friends, his school and his grandmother.” Soon after he first raised the idea, he sent for his wife. Armando’s children moved in with his mother, who still lived around the corner in Mexico. “They are fine with my mother . . . she is a very responsible person. I trust her a lot.” To help with the housework, Armando’s mother hired help after his wife left. His mother was 59 at the time and also cared for another six-year-old grandchild whose parents lived in the US with Armando. In addition, the wife and daughter of another one of Armando’s brothers lived in the home.

“But here comes the saddest part of the story,” Armando warned. After Armando’s wife joined him in the US, they lived together for just three months. Then she

left him. “Now,” Armando explained, “my wife lives with another man. She left me to go live with someone else.”

After his wife left, Armando took over responsibility for the children. For a few months, his wife sent approximately $50 a week for their care, as this was their arrangement upon separation. But then she stopped sending money and stopped calling as frequently as she had before. One day, she called Armando and was very angry. “She said that when she calls, my mother won’t let her talk to the children. It isn’t true. It is that the phone at the house is a cell phone which is sometimes hard to get through on. But since then, she hasn’t been calling. But I try not to ask about her when I call.” Armando said he wanted to know if his ex-wife talked to the children, but was afraid to ask. “[Once] he [Michael] said to me, ‘she forgot about me.’ I was hurting him asking about her, so I stopped.”

Armando said he generally calls home twice a week. When he talks to his son, they discuss “school, some goats he has, his homework, if he took his bath, if he brushed his teeth, if he combed his hair. I ask him to go around to the house and sweep it out. I ask him about his grandmother and about his sisters . . . I see him as a friend aside from being my son. He tells me everything. What they want, what I should buy them, what they like, about school, about the girls . . .” Armando said communication with his daughter Mary was not as easy. “She doesn’t like to talk to me quite so much. When I call she just asks me to come home. She wants me to take her to the plaza. She asks to see me.” Lupe likes to talk a lot on the phone, but Armando felt that communication with her was superficial, as it was with Mary. “Of all of them, I speak most with my son Michael.”

Armando said he sends home $1000 per month and his mother puts what she doesn't use into his savings account. He complained that before his wife came to the United States, he used to send her $100 a week, but that she did not spend the money wisely. Correcting himself, Armando said that they did fix up the bathroom and make some home improvements. But, Armando felt his mother had done a better job administering his meager resources, enabling him to save money for the first time.

Armando said that in the six months since his wife left him, he had hit a real low both emotionally and economically. "I went really down. Because everything broke at the same time. I wanted to go back [to Mexico]. But my siblings gave me a lot of support. They told me I should stay so that I could return to Mexico with something, instead of nothing." At the time of our interview Armando was working two jobs and planned to return to live with his children in Mexico before the holiday season.

Despite Armando's devotion to his children, he stated matter-of-factly, "I feel like the children need their mother." He thought they felt more vulnerable since their mother left home. "Right after I left for the United States, they were more distanced from me, like they didn't miss me much." He believed they felt secure because they lived with their mother. He also suspected that she said bad things to the children about him, telling them that he was irresponsible. Armando felt that this had changed after his wife came to the US. "Things are different now, especially with my son Michael . . . I feel like he looks to me more and that he trusts me more."

"After the separation, I didn't know what to say to my children about their mother. My daughter Mary would ask to talk to her and I would lie, saying that she was out at work." Armando said he wanted to tell his son about what had happened, but

couldn't bring himself to do so and didn't know what to say to the boy. Finally, months later, he decided to break the news. "So one day I called on the phone and said, 'Michael, there is something I have to tell you. Your mother and I no longer live together.' And he said, 'Dad, I know already. The kids at school told me.'"

Armando went on to explain that he has a neighbor from Mexico who also lives in New Jersey. He had sent for his wife at the same time Armando did and the gossip about both women traveled back to his neighborhood. "You see, she did the same thing my wife did."

Armando had not suspected that his neighbors had marital problems. The couple visited Armando and his wife when the women arrived in New Jersey. At first, the other woman didn't work, but Armando's wife helped her find a job. Once she started working, she and her husband began fighting. "One day they had a fight and he hit her, so she left. This is the same thing my wife did." I asked tentatively, "Did you fight with your wife like they did?" Armando admitted that they fought just before she left but he didn't say whether or not physical violence was involved. His family wanted to chip in to rent a new house together, he explained, and they needed to put up some money for the security deposit. Armando said his wife didn't want to live with his family anymore. She said she wouldn't go. She left with a neighbor, saying she already had another place to go. Later, he learned that she went to live with another man. "I loved her and was really upset when she left. I had this idea that we would work together and be able to give our children a better education . . . It wasn't what I thought."

"How do you think your experiences as a father compare to those of your own father?" I asked. "They are completely different," Armando answered without hesitation.

He went on to explain that his own father was very irresponsible. Armando's father never lived with Armando's mother and instead lived with another woman and their children nearby. Armando's father maintained two families for many years, continuing to have more children with each woman. "[In contrast], I consider myself responsible for my children."

ONE FAMILY'S MIGRATION CHAINS

Given Armando's description of his father, I was slightly surprised on my first visit with Armando's family in Mexico that it was his father who spoke to me on the phone, offered us drinks and conversation when we visited the family home on the outskirts of a major Mexican city, and invited us to a formal lunch the following day. Armando's mother, Doña Mica, a trim, handsome woman with shortly cropped curly hair dyed black and a spry body said little about her role in taking care of Armando's children on that first visit. Instead, when I interviewed the couple together the next day at a formal lunch Armando had arranged, and asked about how they had met, Armando's father did most of the talking.

When Armando's father was 24, he met Doña Mica, who was 15. "*la robé* I stole her," he explained, saying he took her to be his wife without asking for formal permission from her parents to do so. At the time, Armando's father was a simple day laborer without steady work. Later he got a job at a hotel where he worked for 30 years, until his health problems prompted his retirement. Doña Mica often supplemented the family income by selling lemons, coconuts and other fruits from the house.

The first in the family to migrate was one of Armando's younger brothers who left for New Jersey with a cousin at the age of 17. He financed the construction of the concrete house where Doña Mica lived with Armando's children. After five years, he returned for two months. At this point he took up with a girlfriend (one of Armando's sister-in-laws whom I met, as she lived with Doña Mica), and then shortly thereafter returned to the United States. He visited again four years later, at which point his girlfriend got pregnant. They married and after a few months, he migrated again, leaving his pregnant wife with Doña Mica. Two years later, he came home to meet his daughter but stayed for just a month. I learned later that day that although his Mexican wife desperately wanted to join him abroad, he is married and has children in the United States as well.

Armando's oldest brother was the next to leave. This brother was married when he first left and was away for three years before returning home for three years. The pattern of seasonal migration continued until his children grew up, when they joined their father in the United States. Only their mother stayed behind due to health problems. She too hoped to be healthy enough in a few months to join her children and husband abroad. "I am the last of the family to be left behind."

A third brother left next and had been in New Jersey for six years when I first met Doña Mica. Like his older brother, he left a wife and daughter behind. However, after two years he sent for his wife while the couple's daughter remained in Doña Mica's care. Just three weeks prior to my visit, the couple had sent for their then six-year-old daughter.

Armando's sister and his youngest brother were the next in line to leave and traveled together. His sister had been married in Mexico before going to the United States, and Armando told me she was often abused by her ex-husband who didn't love her and was extremely jealous. Her brothers helped her migrate to leave the bad marriage behind. "We didn't know that he hit her, she never told us until later. She asked his [husband's] permission to leave and we sent her there [to the United States]. She said she would send for him, but it was a lie. After a year, she told him that it was over."

Armando was the last of the siblings to leave Mexico. I asked Doña Mica how Armando's children had adapted to their parents' migration. "When she [their mother] first left, they cried a lot for her and got sick easily. The boy [Michael] not so much as the girls," she explained. "How long did it take for them to adjust to living with you?" I asked. "Maybe six months."

"Who decided that the children would stay with you?" I asked Doña Mica.

"Armando decided. They have another grandmother in another part of the city, but the kids didn't want to go with her when their mom left. They didn't know her well, and there was really no question that they would stay with me." I wondered, "What does their mother say about them being with you?" According to Doña Mica, "She says she is going to come for them, but we don't really know. That is the gossip that we hear, but it is nothing more than that . . . Their mother wants them to go to the United States and asked her son if he wants to go there with her, but he said no. He doesn't want to go to the United States, he wants to stay in Mexico."

When I asked what will happen to the children when Armando returns from the United States, Armando's father told me, "They will stay where they are because Armando will have to work and someone will need to watch them."

HOMECOMING

True to plan, that December Armando returned to live with his children. We had the chance to meet a few months later when Armando visited family members in a major city near where I was staying. On our visit Armando told me about his reunion with his children. Even though before he told me he trusted his mother completely, he confessed, "I was scared when I arrived about how it would be to see my children. I imagined that they were not well cared for, but not nearly so much as when I saw them. I found them so skinny . . . I had thought that they were better. And I saw my son so old, and I didn't recognize him really. He was so skinny, and the little one as well." I asked him to tell me about the moment he arrived at the house. "The little one came up right away and hugged me." This is the daughter who had never met her father. "Did they cry?" I asked Armando. "Not them. But I did. I felt so moved that tears came out–after four years to see them again so different, not well cared for either . . . much sadder than what I imagined."

Armando said he changed the rules when he arrived. "I had imagined how they were being raised because I know my mother. I know how she raised them. Not that she didn't care for them. More that she spoiled them . . . like she didn't prohibit all the bad things because, well, because she couldn't. So I imagined this. And I arrived and it was true, just as I had imagined it. They were a little confused and I arrived and I began to prohibit the things they shouldn't do . . . Like not going to other people's homes. They

used to go into other people's places to play." He also described having to change rules about food. "If they haven't eaten, I don't want them to have candy. If they haven't eaten, I don't want them to drink soda . . . And also that they wash their hands always before they eat."

Armando also said that coming home he learned about his children's experiences when they has still been with their mother. "My son Michael told me that his mom hit him a lot . . . I didn't know about any of this. I thought they were fine . . . she hit all of them, even the little one when she was just a year old." I asked Armando if his mother had told him this about this.

"No, just my son. He said she hit all three of them. And sometimes they wouldn't eat. Because their mother told them that I didn't send enough money so she didn't buy them anything to eat. And, she wouldn't let them go to their grandmother's house [to eat]. Once the neighbor tried to give them something to eat, but their mother wouldn't let them take it and they were hungry. [Michael said] she would go out a lot for many hours. She wouldn't leave them with my mother, but instead with a neighbor who lived way up the hill . . . and I felt sad [to learn about this]. Because they are children, and it isn't their fault. And I sent her money, enough to eat, and she didn't feed them. Sometimes I didn't send a lot, but I always sent something, enough for food. It was that she didn't spend the money wisely. Because I would send like 800 pesos, that is $80, and that is more than enough for food for a week. My mom never told me anything while I was away. Now that I am back, she has told me a lot of things. I don't know why she didn't tell me–she should have. But she told me that she [ex-wife] would go out a lot and dated a number of different men."

Despite this, Armando thought his children needed their mother. “Mary – it is as if she loves her mother more. Yes, she is affectionate with me, and hugs me . . . but I know that when her mother arrives, that she is going to go more to her mother. Because I feel that she loves her mother more. The other day I was . . . I heard that they talked on the phone. I told my mom that if she [ex-wife] calls to tell her to send the money to their [children’s] other grandmother–to her own father, that is. That she shouldn’t send it to my mother. That if she wants to send it, to send it to her own parents and they can bring it over. So she comes out in defense of her mother–Mary always defends her mother. She says, “it’s better if she sends it here.” I know that if they speak badly of her mother, she [Mary] always defends her. Because she is her mother. She has to love her. You can’t take away their love for their mother. It is stronger, I think, a mother’s love than a father’s love.”

ADJUSTMENTS

In April, I visited Armando’s family again in Mexico. A number of things had changed since I had last seen the family. First, the house seemed different. Armando explained, “It is cleaner than you remember. Everything was a mess when I arrived.” Second, Armando’s sister-in-law, who had lived at the house before with her daughter, had left and moved back in with her own mother. She had gotten fed up waiting for her husband in the United States to send for her and decided to start a new life of her own. I ended up staying in the room where she had slept. Finally, there were two new members of the household: Doña Mica was now taking care of her nephews. Her brother was married but had the three and four-year-old boys with a lover and was in jail when the

boys' mother abandoned them to go off with another man. Doña Mica's sister-in-law refused to take care of the boys born of her husband's affair, and there was no one else to look after them. Doña Mica offered to take them temporarily until their father figured out what to do.

On my visit, I spent most mornings with Armando and his children on outings. In the afternoons, Armando worked at a hotel as an electrician. "How much are you making at your new job?" I asked one day when we visited a nearby pool.

"Not a lot, but they just gave me a raise."

"How much?" I probed.

"Well, now I am earning 120 pesos a day ($12). I just got a raise from 100 pesos ($10)." Armando laughed when thinking back to salaries in the United States, which averaged $10 per hour among the men I interviewed. "It is really nothing. But," he added more seriously, "I have benefits and insurance, so it is better than it sounds. Still, this is why I want to buy a *combi* (minivan used for public transport). They make about three times what I do in a day."

On these various outings, I witnessed how loving Armando was towards his children. In addition, Armando told me about his plans for the future. Specifically, he hoped to marry soon and told me about the different prospects he had in town, one a 24-year-old with a child and the other a 28-year-old. "But they are a little too immature for me," he explained. "Ideally I want someone who is in her 30s. Someone who is mature and who can help me take care of my children." He told me how his daughters get jealous when he goes out on dates. "Sometimes I cannot find my cologne when I am getting

ready to go out. I look everywhere, and it turns out that Mary has hidden it from me to keep me from going."

While Armando was at work, I generally sat with Doña Mica chatting occasionally. Although on my first trip I learned little in interviews with Mary and Michael, this time each had more to say about what it was like to live with their father again. From my conversation with five-year-old Mary:

JD: How do you feel now that your dad is here?

My dad was in the north and I missed him a lot.

JD: Do you feel happy that your dad is here?

My mom left.

JD: Do you feel sad that your mom left?

Yes.

JD: Do you talk to her on the phone?

She doesn't call anymore.

JD: Do you miss her?

Yes, a lot.

JD: What makes you miss her?

That she doesn't call anymore.

JD: Do you want your mom to come back?

Yes.

JD: Are you happy that your dad came back?

Yes.

JD: What do you want to do when you grow up?

I want my mom to come back.

JD: Do you want your mom to live with your dad again?

Yes.

JD: Do you think she is going to come back?

No.

JD: Do you love your mom?

Yes.

JD: And your dad, do you love him?

Yes.

JD: Who do you love more, your mom or your dad?

My dad.

JD: Why?

My mom said she was going to take me [to the US] and she never did.

The following are excerpts from my conversation with Michael:

JD: When your dad left, how old were you?

I was seven.

JD: What year were you in school?

I was in my last year of Kindergarten.

JD: And when you mom left?

I was in second grade.

JD: Some other children have told me that when their parents left, they felt kind of sad and had a hard time keeping up in school. Did that happen to you?

When my dad left.

JD: How was that?

I felt really sad because before he used to take us out a lot and then he didn't.

JD: And your mom?

She didn't tell us, I didn't know when she left. It was just like that, without telling me.

JD: And your dad told you he was going to leave?

Yes, he told me he was going to go.

JD: Do you remember when he left?

No, I don't remember.

JD: I don't mean the date, but do you remember when happened on that day?

Yes.

JD: Tell me about it.

I remember that my dad was with his brother and that they left together. They got into the bus; in the bus they left.

JD: And your mom?

She didn't tell us she was leaving.

JD: Tell me about it.

She left in the morning, I was in school, and she wasn't there when I got back home.

JD: Did you feel bad? Did you ask where she was?

No, I didn't ask anything . . . it was just like that.

JD: Do you talk to your mom now?

No she doesn't really call anymore.

JD: Do you wish she would call more?

Yes.

JD: Do you miss her?

A little.

JD: Did you miss her more when your dad wasn't here?

The same.

JD: Do you love your mom?

A little.

JD: Do you feel like she loves you?

That I don't know.

JD: Do you love your dad?

Yes.

JD: Do you feel that he loves you?

Yes.

ROUTINES

Nearly nine months later, when I visited Armando's family once again in Mexico, the house was just as I remembered it. More surprising was that the children all looked just as I remembered them; none of the five children appeared to have grown much since my last visit, which seemed strange to me. Of Armando's three children, Mary looked the most different. Her hair was long again (after her father arrived he had cut it off saying it was too long to take care of) and her face looked thinner, more like her older brother Michael than before. As for little Lupe, she had grown considerably in personality, if not in size. Michael remained thin, lanky, quiet and distant.

On this visit I spoke mostly with Doña Mica, who was much more comfortable with me than on any of my prior visits. She told me about her nephews and that their mother had come for them, but she refused to let them go without her brother's consent. At the moment, the DIF (Mexican version of Child Protective Services) was involved in the case. Although the boys had now lived with Doña Mica for over a year, they continued to call her *tia*–or aunt. The four- and six-year-old boys did not attend school, although Lupe and Mary at the same age were both in school that year.

Doña Mica told me, "Mary is jealous of her father. She doesn't want him to find another wife. But I tell her that someday she is going to get married and then there will be no one to take care of her father. Who will make his food? I say. I tell her that he has to do it because her mother left him over there [United States]."

I asked about what news they had of Armando's ex-wife. Doña Mica said she called around the time I had last visited the family and then again over the holidays. Over Christmas, she sent her own mother over to visit and to bring a doll and 200 pesos ($20).

One day, Doña Mica told me, she couldn't find Mary and Lupe. Although it turned out they were visiting a neighbor, Doña Mica grew terribly worried after looking up and down the streets and not finding them anywhere. The first thought that came to her mind was that their other grandmother had come and stolen them away.

Doña Mica also reported that when their mother called, Michael did not want to talk to her. His mother complained over the phone saying, "Why don't you want to talk . . . you don't love me anymore?" and Michael answered curtly, "That is just the way I am." Doña Mica confirmed that Michael is resentful of his mother for leaving them.

> His mother asked Michael, "What do you want me to send you?" And he answered, "Whatever." And when she asked, "What is wrong, son?" He answered, "Nothing, this is who I am." Lupe told her that she wants some sneakers. Michael was laughing at her for this because she asked for something that her father had recently bought her . . . see there they are (pointed to a pair of shoes laying out in the bedroom)."

As for little Lupe, "She says, 'She is not my mother.' She says that I am her mother. She says that she is no longer Perez Lopez, because [Lopez] is her mother's last name. She says that she is Perez Marquez, because I am a Marquez. She says that her sister Mary can be a Perez Lopez if she [Mary] wants, but not her. She is going to be a Perez Marquez.[23]"

[23] In Mexico, people usually take two last names. The first last name is the father's last name and the second last name is the mother's last name.

Later that afternoon I went to the beach for a walk and when I returned I had a bath. Mary and Lupe, as on my earlier visits, wanted to play with my hair. I let them braid it while watching TV. Out of the blue, although in retrospect I think it was because Mary knew why I had come to visit, Mary blurted out:

> I don't have a mother.
>
> JD: What do you mean that you don't have a mother?
>
> Because my mama Cici left my dad and she went with another [man].
>
> JD: So that is why she isn't your mother anymore?
>
> No, not anymore.
>
> JD: And your grandmother?
>
> Lupe calls her mother . . . (notable pause) . . . and me too.

For Mary, and perhaps also for her siblings to a lesser degree, feelings about her mother had shifted significantly due over the past year. Uncomfortable with the idea of their father remarrying, but increasingly angry with their mother, Armando's girls looked now to their grandmother as the most important maternal figure in their lives.

CONTINUITIES

Michael, Mary, and Lupe's experiences suggest that marital conflicts create opportunities for fathers like Armando to grow closer to their children and expand their role in the family beyond that of economic provider. However, these changes are generally short-lived. After a period of turmoil has passed, families, like this one, may

return to gendered routines in which women, whether a grandmother or new spouse, are the primary caretakers of children.

Why do fathers like Armando exert so much effort to reconnect with their children after a post-migration divorce? And why, given that mothers are generally the primary caregivers in divorced families (see Amato and Booth 1996; Furstenberg and Cherlin 1994), do transnational mothers retreat from their children back in Mexico? It is possible that mothers feel embarrassed about having left their husbands or that they simply want to wash their hands of their children to enjoy newfound freedoms abroad, but neither seems likely. For one, there is a strong preference among Mexican families, as in the United States, for mothers to retain custody of children after marriages break up. Of the six migrant mothers I interviewed who divorced in Mexico before coming to the United States, the three who did not have custody of their children had bitter fights with their ex-husbands over the children (which prompted their migration). In San Angel, the only family I met in which a father had custody of the children was one in which the marriage broke up in the United States. Second, mothers who divorced in the United States expressed interest in their children and did not abandon them completely. In Armando's case, his ex-wife spread rumors that she was planning on returning to Mexico for Mary. Even migrant mothers who broke social norms showed interest in their children.

I would suggest that mothers' transgressions made fathers like Armando feel more entitled to develop greater emotional connections with children as long as they were able to provide for them economically. This is because unlike mothers, these fathers had not symbolically failed in their moral responsibilities as parents. Yet gendered

expectations do not really change as a result of their greater involvement with children left behind, since economic expectations of fathers remain intact. When circumstances change and mothers–or other women–again become available to children, fathers often cede to women once more.

Parents' relationships with their children are not rigid. Gendered expectations of parenthood are under negotiation during the changes that accompany migration. The conditions under which fathers embrace greater involvement in the care of their children, however, and the temporary duration of such shifts, shows that family members often negotiate relationships without revolutionizing gendered expectations of parents. As a result, children-like Michael, Mary, and Lupe-often feel more betrayed by their migrant mothers than by their fathers, but end up lacking the motherly caretaking they crave from both of their parents.

Chapter 6

CHILDREN

Expectations of migrant parents are ultimately fairly straightforward, despite the gendered assessments of failure or success they involve. By working in the United States parents are expected to be able to better provide for their children than if they remained with children in Mexico. What of the other side of the coin? Expectations of children may not initially seem terribly demanding. When I asked one father what he expected from his two children living in Mexico, he said,

> Expectations? Well, that sounds a little weird to me. *De alla pa' aca* (from there to here), yes. I feel like there are quite a lot of expectations of those of us working here. But what do I expect of them? What can I say? That they take care of themselves. That they are good. That they study. That is it.

Thus on the surface, during periods of family separation there is an imbalance in expectations, as expressed by this father, with the burden on migrant parents who must make something of their time in the United States so that the sacrifice of leaving their children behind is worthwhile. At least, this is immigrant parents' view.

Consideration of the lives of children left behind shows that the seemingly simple expectations of children that they study, take care of themselves and behave are in fact significant. Underlying these simple statements are parents' expectations that children will understand their reasons for leaving, continue to love and respect parents who are not

a part of their lives, and–as they get older–show that their parents' sacrifices were worthwhile by making something of themselves in Mexico. All of this must be accomplished without the daily support of parents and often while living in relatives' homes. The aspirations for academic achievement are particularly potent: children's education is a key feature of the "inter-generational contracts" between migrant parents and children (Kabeer 2000). Parents often described their children's schooling as justifying their absence. Migrant parents reasoned that they could work for a number of years at low wage jobs in the United States, and then retire in Mexico once their children were professionals and could support them through old age. In the end, the expectations of children left behind in Mexican transnational families are actually exceedingly high. Their ability to better themselves lies at the heart of the migration narrative.

Drawing on the theoretical stance most fully developed by William Corsaro (1997, 2003) and Barrie Thorne (1993), in this chapter I discuss the experiences of children left behind by considering children's worlds as partially created by and understood by children themselves. Taking into account how children themselves understand parental migration suggests that most feel they are unable to live up to their parents' expectations of them during periods of family separation.

Yet analysis of children's experiences shows that they have some degree of power in their relationships with the adults in their lives. In Mexican child-centered, families the needs of children loom large symbolically and practically. When children exhibit disappointment at parental absences, they increase parents' feelings of insecurity about being away. When children have difficulties in meeting parents' goals of upward mobility through academic achievement, parents may reallocate more of the family

resources to this end. While children actually have little say in their parents' decisions to leave home, children who are left behind, including very young children, negotiate emotional responses to family separation and its economic ramifications. In doing so, they have an important role in shaping Mexican family migration patterns.

I now turn to an analysis of how children of different ages react to parental absence and how their conflicted feelings ultimately enhanced their relative power within their families. Unlike parents, whose experiences varied depending on their gender, I find that children's experiences were affected less by their gender than by their age. Although there is individual variation, young children, teenagers and young adults responded to parental absence quite differently. Because children's stages affect their reactions, Mexican transnational families are dynamic and constantly in flux. Children left behind must manage separation from their parents in relation to their different needs over time.

YOUNG CHILDREN

Some researchers have suggested, based on studies in other contexts, that the younger children are at the age of separation from parents the greater the impact of separation on their relationships with parents (Woodward, Fergusson and Belsky 2000). I found, however, that young children did not describe feeling as overtly distressed by parents' migration as teenagers did. Young children, though, had their own ways of showing that parental absences mattered. They did this primarily by engaging in different types of emotional withholding.

Naming

Five-year-old Miguel[24] was not an expert on U.S. migration like some of the other children I interviewed. While talking to his grandmother, she mentioned that he was afraid of *gringos*. I called him over from playing with Temo and asked the boy, "What are *gringos*?" "Police," he answered and ran back to play. Miguel also did not know that *el norte* was the same thing as the *Estados Unidos*. But the young boy demonstrated a clear understanding of his family structure. When I asked who he lived with, he said his "mama Carmela" (his grandmother), his "papa Paulo" (his grandfather), and his "tio Jose" (an uncle) and that his mother and father live in *el norte*. Miguel added that he misses both his mother and father a lot and that he wants them to come back home.

Doña Carmela, Miguel's grandmother, told me that he is very attached to her since she raised him from infancy. When his parents came back to visit two years ago, he refused to go live with them at their house. "Does he cry for his parents?" I asked.

> No, no he doesn't cry for them. Sometimes he cries because he says that I am not his mother. He has an uncle that is always telling him that I am not his mother, that I am his grandmother and he cries . . . He gets mad when they say that I am his grandmother instead of his mother. Sometimes he comes home upset and says he is mad because they said that I am not his mother. He says I have this many mothers [shows two fingers] and this many fathers [shows two fingers] and this many grandparents [shows three fingers] because he says he has his mother there and me, his father there and his father here. And his grandparents are his fathers' parents and my mother who is still alive.

[24] Miguel and his grandmother Doña Carmela are not members of a family constellation.

Among the young children I interviewed, the naming of caregivers–mostly grandmothers–in Mexico as *mama* or *mami* was common. Yet all of the children I interviewed–even at the young age of five–understood that they have two mothers and, at times, two fathers, even when they call their grandmother mom. None got mixed up in telling me that their "mother" and / or "father" lived in the United States. They recounted conversations with and showed me pictures of their migrant parents, and they often pointed out the gifts their migrant parents had sent them. Like Miguel, most claimed to have multiple mothers and, at times, multiple fathers.

For some children, the naming of caregivers in Mexico as mothers was due to parents' careful instruction. Migrant mothers described the sharing of the title of mother as the price of leaving children behind. They conceded that children should call caregivers mom, as they were the ones doing the daily care work. At the same time, mothers felt offended when children did not recognize them as mothers as well. One grandmother explained that her daughter told the children to call her *mama* instead of *abuelita* because it was only right because she would be taking care of the children. But when her daughter called home and spoke to her son, she would say, "Who am I?" and the little boy would answer, "My sister Rosa" after which she would correct him quickly, "No, no, no, I am your mother."

While calling grandmothers *mama* is a way of expressing the emotional connection children shared with caregivers in Mexico, when children subsequently refused to call migrant parents *mama* or *papa* they signaled their lack of connection, or *cariño*, for them.

One five-year old girl I interviewed lived with her brother, her grandmother, who they call *mama,* and their great-grandmother, who they call *abuelita*; their biological parents and grandfather work in New York City. When looking at pictures with the family, the girl intentionally pointed out pictures of her grandfather in the United States, "Look, it's my dad." She pulled out another picture of her grandparents and boasted, "Look it is my mom and my dad." When I held a picture of her biological parents and asked who was in the picture, she replied with a devious smile. "I don't know." She deferred to her six-year-old brother, who supplied, "It's Miguel and Janet." When I interviewed her she clearly distinguished between "mama Janet" [the mother] and "mama Fatima" [the grandmother]. She had no trouble identifying her parents when I was ambiguous in asking what she talks about "with them" on the phone: "My mom says they are going to take me [there]." When I asked where "they" work, she explained, "My mom doesn't work. My dad does." The five-year-old told me that her mother was going to take her to the United States and she did not want to go. Although at times she reffered to her biological mother as mom, tt seemed that since she was nervous about this proposition, she deliberately pointed out that her grandmother was the mom who no one else–not even her biological mother–could be.

Many children seemed conscious that their use of names could make their mothers feel badly about being away. One migrant mother (Sandra), whose nine-year-old daughter remained in Mexico, told me:

> When I call I ask to speak with my daughter and, although they are not talking to me, I overhear a conversation that goes something like this. They say, "Come,

> Raquel, your mom is calling." And she answers, "Who? Who wants to talk to me?" "Your mom." "Oh, Sandra" [name drawn out] she says before coming to talk to me on the phone.

According to one grandmother, her 14-year-old granddaughter "has always called her mother by her first name. I can tell that she doesn't really love her . . . My daughter gets upset and cries to me over the phone. She says that she doesn't love her."

Indeed, I often sensed an underlying anxiety around the names for the migrant mothers I interviewed. Ofelia, for example, claimed not to be bothered by her son German's affection towards her mother but said, "You see, he calls my mother, mama. But he knows that I am his mother because he says so." Nydia also said that four-year-old Kevin calls her mother mom but was quick to explain, "He doesn't deny [that I am] his mother. He knows that I have my place [in his life]." Although biological mothers were willing to share the name of mother with their children's primary caregiver, when children pointedly avoided acknowledging their biological parents, mothers felt offended. Naming demarcates the emotional costs of mothers' absences.

Interestingly, naming marked the emotional toll of mothers' absences but not that of fathers. Although children often said they have two fathers, no fathers reported taking offense at their children's naming practices. As Salazar-Parreñas (2005) found among children of Filipino migrants, a mother's absence has a different meaning from that of a father. The use of names as a sign of affection appears to challenge mothers' investment in a maternal identity.

Acting Indifferent

Another way young children expressed the emotional effects of separation was by pretending to be indifferent towards their biological parents. Although children spoke frequently to their migrant parents on the phone, they often communicated an "out of sight out of mind mentality" to them.

Many times children acted uninterested when their parents called home. According to Nydia, "The only thing that makes me feel badly about my son is when he doesn't want to talk to me. Sometimes there is a little bit of distance between us and he doesn't want to talk." One caregiver I interviewed who looked after her sister's nine-year-old son after his mother migrated said the boy often refused to talk to his mother on the phone. "I didn't want my sister to think that I was telling him not to talk to her. So sometimes I would trick him to get him to talk to her on the phone . . . My sister would cry when he didn't want to talk to her."

Children acted most indifferent when parents came home to visit (see also Schmalzbauer 2005a). Even when children anxiously awaited parents' return, once they arrived children's behavior indicated to parents that migration was not without a price. One mother I met in San Angel said she was only away from her three children for a year, but when she came back her five-year-old twins hid from her. "They said, since you left, we don't know you anymore." Another mother in San Angel said that her son spread the rumor that he wasn't going to accept her and her husband when they returned from the United States. "He would tell his uncles that he wasn't going to love us when we came home." Whereas naming was most distressing for mothers, fathers also felt the sting of children's indifference. For example, when I interviewed Daniel two years after his children went to live with his mother-in-law in Mexico, he explained, "They don't

remember me. You don't know what that is. It is hard. They get [me] confused with a brother of mine; they think he is their dad."

It is, of course, understandable that children would feel uncomfortable when their parents come home. Children who have grown up without their parents may anxiously await their return, but simply not know how to feel or be unsure about how to express conflicting feelings when parents finally show up. A mother and grandmother I interviewed in San Angel explained how one 11-year-old girl reacted to her mother's return.

> *Mother*: Well she knew [I was coming] and she was really anxious. She would ask how many days was it until we would arrive.
>
> *Grandmother*: Then the car came and it was outside. So I said to her, "Go, go see your mother." And she said, "No, I don't want to."
>
> *Mother*: But then she came to me, but it was forced, like if all of a sudden she was embarrassed and didn't want to come.

Later, the mother explained, "She called me mom every since I arrived, but she wouldn't get close to me. It is only now [two months later] that she is starting to warm up."

Members of many other families described children's feelings of discomfort as temporary. In fact, some researchers have suggested that distress upon reunion with parents is typical among young children and is short-lived (Bowlby 1973, cited in Smith,

Lalone, and Johnson 2004). But at age 30, Paulo still recalled the uneasiness he felt when his father Enrique returned to visit. “When he returned after a lot of time, well, I felt really uncomfortable, as if he was a stranger, for the very reason that we didn’t really have a relationship because I was little when he left.” Paulo’s father left when he was 14 and after just three years, when Paulo was 17, his father started to visit the family in Mexico annually. Paulo said that although he gets along with his father, he still feels uncomfortable around him. When Paulo visited with his parents I watched how he was outwardly affectionate with his mother yet shied away from his father’s company even after he described how important the father figure is to him during our interview. Children’s indifference when reunited with their parents may have long-term consequences for parent-child relationships, as is suggested by research on adult children separated from parents as minors (Arnold 2006; Olwig 1999; Smith, Lalone, and Johnson 2004).

Paulo’s younger sister Trinidad’s conflicting emotions of discomfort and concern for her father are telling. She was 12 when her father first migrated and 15 when Enrique started to return home regularly. At age 25 she cried when describing how her father’s migration affected her: “I felt that the north took him away.” When I met Trinidad, she had lived with her father for over six years after joining him in the United States and appeared to care greatly for him. For example she was nearly worried to tears about him driving long distances to transport family members while his father, her grandfather, was gravely ill. Yet she also seemed to genuinely distrust her father, often making comments about whether or not he was “behaving”, referring to drinking while she and her mother

were away. Trinidad's anxiety suggested that she felt disconnected from her father and unable to influence him, despite his emotional importance to her.

Like Paulo and Trinidad, all the children I interviewed, even children whose parents left them while they were very young, indicated that their parents were important to them. They generally said that they missed their parents, loved them or wanted them to come home. Even children who said they didn't love one or both of their parents said they missed them sometimes just because they weren't around. Thus, when young children display indifference to parents, over the phone or when parents return to visit, it does not mean that they really are indifferent or that parents are unimportant to them. Rather young children feel their parents have not lived up to their expectations. In effect, by pretending to be indifferent, they expressed resentment at their powerlessness to affect the migration decisions of their parents, whom they cared about deeply.

Parental Authority Deferred

Younger children almost always defer to their substitute caregivers for permission to do things, a pattern that changes dramatically during the teenage years. Even upon parents' returns, either for temporary visits or more permanently, children often continue to defer to their substitute caregiver's authority during an adjustment period. According to one grandmother, for example, when her daughter first came home her grandchildren were very happy, but it took them a while to adjust to the mother's authority. "At first it was still, grandma this and grandma that. Not until now are they leaving me a little and going to their mother." When I asked an 11-year-old girl in San Angel whose parents just returned from the United States, "Who do you ask permission to do things with?" she responded, "I ask my parents for permission only because that is what my grandmother

told me I should do." Many parents find they cannot effectively exert authority over the phone. Nydia told me that when she calls her son in Mexico, "Maybe if I correct him he listens to me and sometimes he doesn't. But with my parents, no. There is more respect for them."

Like feigning indifference, always asking for permission of the primary caregiver in Mexico was a something that children did in all four types of transnational families. When parents or single mothers were away, children turned to their grandparents. In migrant father-only families, children almost always continued to defer to their mothers even when fathers came home. As fathers tend to consider authority in Mexican families to be ultimately theirs (see Esteinou 2004), children's deference to mothers was often hurtful for migrant fathers. According to Gabriela, "The kids always come to me for permission and with their problems. My husband has even commented to them, 'Am I not worth anything here?' Once he told them, 'I am going to leave because you don't respect me.'"

One day, Gabriela's 10-year-old son Gilberto demonstrated the way children overlook migrant parents for authority. When I saw Gilberto hanging around on the street, I asked to interview him again about what it was like to have his father home for a visit. He agreed. I explained that we first had to ask his parents for permission.

> We walked down the street together and seeing that his parents weren't at home, Gilberto went across the street to his grandmother's place to look for them. I lagged behind outside but was close enough to see Gilberto ask his father, sitting just inside the door, where his mother was. Learning that she was at a meeting,

> Gilberto came back out and said his mother wasn't around so we would have to do it later.

Later that evening, Angelo laughed about the incident and explained that this was a common occurrence with all of his four children, especially his eight-year-old son. "He is always playing marbles with his friends on the street. He comes into the house and walks by me looking for his mother to ask if he can go play. I stop him and say, 'What's this, *¿y yo qué?*' What about me?."

Whether intentional or subconscious, overlooking their migrant parents and ceding authority to the caregivers who raise them, signals the importance of the primary caregiver in children's lives. Migrant parents may laugh it off, but later shake their heads and wonder, as Angelo did, what about me? In effect, ignoring parents' authority underscores the emotional costs of parental absences.

Refusing to Migrate

The young children I met in Mexico often resisted parents' efforts to reunite the family in the United States. It may be surprising that migrant parents do not exert parental authority and send for children against their will, but their unwillingness to do so is consistent with Lewis' (2000) description of minimal intervention parenting strategies in a Mixtec community of Oaxaca (see also Esteinou 2004:18). It is also consistent with one of the principal manifestations of familism--the symbolic centrality of children to Mexican families. This regional tendency towards permissive parenting, and the notion that migration provides parents' with the best way to meet children's economic needs,

affords younger children greater influence over migration decisions than occurs when parents and children lived together.

Parents often described their plans to return to Mexico to try to win their children over. One mother told me, for example, that she had wanted to send for her 10-year-old daughter, which would have cost approximately $3,000. Her daughter, however, said no. "I didn't insist because she has to make the decision herself." Instead, the mother returned to San Angel for a three-month visit where I met and interviewed her. This came at significant cost as she had no income during this period, had to finance her return home, and–if all went as planned–would pay for the undocumented crossing of both herself and her daughter. Similarly, Zelia went back to San Angel for her son Juan Luis. On the last day of her three week visit, six-year-old Juan Luis decided that he preferred to stay in Mexico. Zelia returned to the United States without him, having spent nearly $3,000 for the visit. When I interviewed her a few months later in New Jersey, she was pregnant and still intended to go back for Juan Luis, although she was unsure how she would financially manage reuniting her family in the future.

When young children make parents feel bad for being away, parents may make significant efforts to send for their children, involving substantial economic resources given their status as low-wage workers in the United States. In this way young children's emotional reactions to their parents' absences may have significant economic repercussions.

EARLY ADOLESCENCE

While younger children's responses to their parents' absences subtly remind migrant parents about what they are missing, as children age they grow more outwardly

resentful. One 15-year-old boy who had lived with his grandparents his entire life, told me that his parents' absence is harder to deal with than when he was younger, "Because before I didn't feel anything . . . and now I understand a lot of things." According to a grandmother I interviewed who had raised a total of ten grandchildren at different points, the change occurs at about age ten. "That is when they start to figure things out," she told me. "I always tried to tell my grandchildren the good things about their parents, and not talk badly about them. But it doesn't matter, because at this age they start questioning things."

A commonly held belief is that conflict between parents and children increases dramatically during adolescence as a byproduct of puberty (Laursen, Coy, and Collins 1998). Research suggests, however, that although certain sources of conflict may increase, such as finances, other sources of conflict, such as chores or appearance, may actually decrease during adolescence (Galambos and Almeida 1992). I have found three areas of conflict to be salient among teenagers in Mexican transnational families that are distinct from those observed among the younger children I interviewed: maneuvering around ambiguous lines of authority, acting out, and experiencing difficulties at school. Although these three areas of conflict may not be all that different from those experienced by children living with their parents, Mexican children left behind described these conflicts as being uniquely shaped by parental absence.

Ambiguous Line of Authority

Most teenagers I met enjoyed relatively high levels of freedom in their daily activities while living with substitute caregivers. A common pattern in Mexican transnational families is for caregivers in Mexico to be more lenient with young children

than are parents. One grandmother explained, for example, “I have them really spoiled. Anything they ask for, if I have the money, they get it.” Once children become teenagers, however, caregivers find it difficult to retain authority over the children. A family friend of Nicandra’s two teenage children told me, “[W]hen their grandmother was here, the boys would trick her. Once she was asleep they would sneak out. They basically have been doing their own thing for years.” One caregiver complained that her nine-year-old nephew “started going out a lot and would get into trouble. He wouldn’t listen to me.” A grandfather explained that raising his grandchildren was not like raising his own children. “With my grandchildren it is different. They do what they want.” His wife agreed. “I talk to them and they just don’t listen to me.”

When teenagers find that caregivers become stricter during adolescence, they often turn to their migrant parents who are seen to be more lenient. Tina and Brian’s aunt told me that authority conflicts occurred in their family because her mother, Doña Silvia, is strict and doesn’t let them go out. Tina often complained to her father over the phone and he would tell her not to worry, that he would talk to her grandmother. According to the aunt:

> Their father is far away and really doesn’t know what is going on here. So he can say, be nice to the kids, let them go out, just so they all get along. But he is not here dealing with them. And if the kids get in trouble, like Brian getting some girl pregnant, he will surely blame my mother for not watching over him enough.

A grandmother explained, “Their mother and father have the last word, not us. These girls ask for permission from them over there and then they leave.” In effect, teenagers used unclear lines of authority between parents and caregivers to gain greater personal freedom in their daily lives.

Interviews also suggest that parents in the United States attempt to win their teenagers’ respect via friendship rather than parental authority. According to one migrant mother, “My mother is the strict voice and I try to be a little bit more compassionate and understanding.” Tony, 13 when first left alone, told me his mother Nicandra “has always spoken to us like a friend.” One migrant father told me that when he calls home his 19- and 17-year-olds say they want to go to the disco, but that their mother won’t let them. “Later I talk to my wife about it and tell her to let them.” Another migrant father said that during one recent phone call, his teen-aged son told him that he was hanging out with a group of friends who marked their eyebrows with razor cuts (implying gang membership). “I told my son that I never hung out with a group of friends like that because it is better to be your own person, rather than follow others. But if he wants to be with them . . . I am not going to tell him no.” He went on to explain, “I try to be my son’s friend.”

If teenagers exercised more autonomy because of the ambiguity of authority and migrant parents’ eagerness to please from a distance, they were not particularly happy about it. Rather, they described experiences of increased autonomy as something undesirable that would not have been possible if parents were present. Paula’s daughter Cindy, who had been in trouble for fighting at school and going out late with her boyfriend, said, “For me it is very exceptional – it is something really painful for me that

my mother isn't here with me." Cindy described her mother's discipline in a positive light, as something she missed.

> Before when we would come back from school, well, she was here and then after she left, there was no one here. Before she would scold us and hit us and now there is no one around to scold or hit us when we come home from school . . . now I am alone.

Cindy was not alone in her experience. When I asked Tony what he missed most about his mother, he answered, "Everything. The food . . . I even miss that she scolds me." And Tina at age 13 admitted during our second interview in April that over the past year she started hanging out with the wrong crowd at school. "It's just that, you know, I started hanging out with some friends who have lots of problems, like me." She started cutting class and her grades mid-year plummeted and she was nearly suspended. When I had interviewed Tina months earlier she was quick to answer my question about what made her miss her migrant parents. "I miss my mother's affection and as for my father, I miss that he corrects me."

Acting Out

Every time there was a social event in downtown San Angel, I noticed Nico[25], unmistakable for his bleached, spiked hair. Nico was generally the youngest person hanging around with a crowd of older boys. I guessed that he was about 11, and was surprised to learn when I visited his fifth grade classroom that he was actually 13. Nico stuck out not only for his hair, but also for openly blurting out that both his parents lived

[25] Nico is not a member of a family constellation.

in the United States. He seemed to feel special that I was interested in the experiences of children like him.

During the week of the town *feria*, I saw Nico out every night on the rides until late. On the eve of the week's culminating events, Nico was at the rodeo; he and a friend were the youngest groupies hanging around the *jinetes* (cowboys who ride the bulls). I recognized his companion as a seventh grader at the middle school; Nico was much quieter than the other boy, a true tag along.

Later in the evening, I saw the two boys again at the dance in front of the Municipal Building. I noticed Nico and his friend first at about 1 AM. They were lying on the unattended trampolines giggling, and called out catcalls to me in English. Since the boys were young, I answered with a smile, and walked by, thinking to myself that someone needs to take these kids to bed.

About an hour later, the two were out dancing to a *banda* hit. They were jumping all about acting crazy to the music and laughing and bumping into each other and another inebriated young man, who must have been a cousin or brother. I watched them for a bit, enough to notice that the older chaperones abandoned the boys for some ladies shortly thereafter. At 2:45 AM, Nico was alone, lying on the grass in the park yawning. He was too tired keep up with the others.

The next afternoon, I saw Nico accompany a frail, hunched old woman to a store downtown to make copies of her ID card. I subsequently learned that she was his 83-year-old grandmother. When I later interviewed her in a two-room house whose floor was filled with chicken droppings, Doña Elizabeth told me that she recently had a stroke and has trouble hearing. "I am the only one to take care of him. He doesn't get along with

Trini [younger woman who lives in house adjoining the property]. His oldest brother lives down there too, but he doesn't get on with him . . . You know, he doesn't really love his parents. I noticed this when they came back to visit. He was like eight years old. When they came he didn't want to have anything to do with them and since then he doesn't want to talk to them on the phone . . . His parents call, but they talk to me. He says he doesn't want to talk to them. He never does. I will call to him and tell him to come to the phone, but he doesn't show up." When I asked Doña Elizabeth for permission to interview Nico, she agreed but explained, "He isn't here now. You can find him downtown. He usually goes there to watch the volleyball games in the evening and comes back late. During the day he is always down at the river somewhere." The interview ended when Doña Elizabeth fell asleep while crocheting on the floor.

Before I interviewed Nico, I spoke with a number of members of the family to learn more. All confirmed that Doña Elizabeth had absolutely no authority over Nico. When I mentioned that the house seemed in disrepair, one of Nico's aunts told me, "You should have seen it before, when Adrian [Nico's older brother who died of a hepatitis infection] was alive. It was much worse. Now it is better because at least the old woman has a cement floor." Nico, I learned from his teachers, had been left back three times at school. They described him as a young boy with lots of problems, a lost cause in the mere fifth grade.

Given Nico's markedly difficult home life, I suspected that Nico was resentful of his parents for leaving him behind. In confirmation, when I asked him about what he spoke to them about on the phone, his answer was curt, "I tell them to send money." This response was notably different from that of most other children who, as described in

Chapter 4, generally did not view their relationship with parents to a purely economic one. In addition, when I asked Nico for details about his parents he said, "I don't remember. They left me when I was little," even though his grandmother told me his father was back in February and his mother came to visit one year before.

Despite being more unruly and outwardly resentful of his parents than others, in many ways Nico responded to my questions much like the other children I interviewed. For example, Nico told me he didn't know why his parents did not come back to Mexico, that he doesn't want to join them in the United States, and that he wanted them to return to Mexico. When I asked, "What do you think it would be like to live with your parents?" he answered, "Not the same as living with my grandma." Although unsure if his mother and father love him or if he loves them, Nico said he felt more affection for his father. Given his general air of ambivalence during the interview, I was surprised at Nico's decisive answer that he would not leave his children to go work in the United States in the future. I asked, "Do you think it is worse for the mom or the dad to go to the US?" Nico answered, "the mom." "Why?" He answered, "because it is different . . . The mom [is different] from the dad . . . it is that the dad doesn't do what a mom should do with her child."

Nico's case was one of the most disheartening because he was one of the few I interviewed who truly lacked proper care. Yet he was also the quintessential example of the behavioral difficulties that may crop up among children of migrant parents. Some children I interviewed who lived with caring substitute caregivers and had extensive contact with migrant parents acted out in similar ways. Cindy, who had lived in the same home since birth, was described by her family as having a temper and often getting in

fights at school. Tony also described skipping classes and getting in fights at school after his mother left. One teenager complained that her 12-year-old brother had become a troublemaker since her mother left just a year before and had recently been called to the office for breaking a window at school. Another teenager raised by her grandmother her entire life told me that her older brother had already joined their parents, divorced and both remarried, in the United States because he was misbehaving in town. "[He left] because he was very bad. He would go out a lot and he got in trouble at school. So he went to live with my mom. But, he stayed the same there. Then they sent him to live with my father. I think he is still doing the same thing."

Time and again, parents, grandparents and teachers I interviewed described behavioral difficulties with children of migrant parents (see also Aguilera-Guzman et al. 2004; Levitt 2001). For example, according to Doña Beatriz, mother of 12, 7 of whom lived with her when her husband went to work in the United States for two years, "Everything was destroyed [after he left]. Everyone was sad and didn't eat well anymore. Some of them were insolent and rude to me. I think that they lacked a paternal figure." Another woman explained that when she went to the United States for three years, she left two sons in San Angel. The younger boy studied and even went on to high school, but her 14-year-old son dropped out of middle school. "He would go and drink and they would tell me that they found him drunk hanging out on the hill all the time . . . then he went to live with his girlfriend's family. He got her pregnant." To this day, the young man lives with his wife's family and is known to be a drunk.

Nicandra's 16-year-old son Miguel articulated the feelings of abandonment that help explain why children misbehave while parents work abroad. Although Nicandra did

not describe Miguel having problems when she migrated, he was left back twice and dropped out at age 14. Miguel attributed most of his personal failures to his mother's migration. For example, Miguel told me he started to smoke at the age of 12 when his mother left, although he has more recently beaten the habit. "I felt desperate because I lived alone with my grandmother, only, and my brother. And I started the habit because, many times, you know it chills you out, it calms your nerves, and all that." Miguel joined a neighborhood gang and was involved in simple assaults, though he was never caught. "To me it didn't matter. Not having my mother, I felt strange. I felt like what did it matter. If I saw a person staring at me it was like, what do you want? I would look for a fight." Miguel said he was different when his mother returned to visit. "I dropped all of this when she [mom] came back. She came back and I stopped. Having her, I don't feel like smoking or doing things that I am not supposed to do."

Another mark of misbehavior families described was older siblings abusing younger siblings. For example, the grandparents of one 17-year-old who had assumed much of the housework after her parents migrated said she often hit her younger siblings inappropriately. Also, as described previously, 11-year-old Eric, 8-year-old Edwin and 7-year-old Osvaldo[26] had a difficult time after their mother migrated. Their cousin described a similar dynamic among the three siblings:

> You know, the oldest one feels very responsible for the other two. It is as if he takes on the role of the father. He hits his brothers . . . The other day, oh how it made me want to cry . . . I heard some shouts from their room and I went to see what they were doing. The little one [Osvaldo] was on the floor, doubled over and

[26] These three siblings are not members of a family constellation.

> holding his stomach. The middle one [Edwin] was crying that his older brother [Eric] was beating up the little one. But Osvaldo was crying because he said his older brother said, "I've had enough of you." The older one [Eric] came and said that "it is just that I've had enough of everything me and me all of the time. I love my brother a lot, but I get tired."

Children of migrant parents may "act out" for several reasons. Unlike children living with their parents, children in transnational families may feel that no one cares about what they are doing. Although most had concerned caregivers and parents, during adolescence children of U.S. migrants wanted to feel accountable to their parents and felt that physical separation prevented this. In addition, children of migrant parents tend to feel increased responsibility–for themselves and their younger siblings–after their parents leave. Some teenagers took out the pressure caused by this increased responsibility by acting aggressively.

School Performance

Aside from trouble such as gang activity, drinking or drug abuse, a more widespread difficulty families reported was in school performance. Forty-one percent of children over age 14 whom I interviewed dropped out of school in the middle of their studies and 27 percent of those over age 7 had been left back in school at least once. Some had been left back multiple times. Although comparison figures with local children without migrant parents are not available, this finding is supported by other research in Mexico that describes children of migrant parents, particularly boys, as having a greater propensity to drop out of school than children of non-migrants (Aguilera-Guzman et al.

2004; Gioguli 2004; Kandel and Kao 2001). This pattern contradicts the expectations of most parents. As Angelo told me, "My idea is not to live here [United States]. It has always been to have a better life there [Mexico]. It doesn't matter to me that I sacrifice the present–I want my children to have a career in Mexico." Given their parents' expectations, why do children left behind have such trouble in school?

Interviews suggest that there are four reasons that children of migrant parents have difficulties in school. First many children, at all age levels, experienced low levels of depression after their parents' departures. For example, Brian, in the tenth grade, told me that when his mother left while he was in seventh grade, he didn't feel like studying much because he missed her. "It lasted about three, no, I think two months." Another 15-year-old girl explained that she had trouble focusing at school the day her father left four years before. She recalled being not being able to do a standardized test on the day he left. "I had nothing in my head."

Although a few children I met were able to bounce back from these episodes of depression to do well in school, for many a drop in performance after a parent's departure had long-term ramifications. For example, Doña Beatriz's 17-year-old son Roberto, who described himself as a very sensitive person, told me he felt sad when he was 12 and his father left for the United States. A year later he dropped out of middle school. I asked, "What happened? Did you want to go to live with your father?" "No," he answered. "I missed him. I didn't want to go to the United States, but I simply didn't feel like studying anymore." After two years, his father came home. Roberto went back to school, graduated and, when I met him, was in his first year of high school. A few months later, however, Roberto dropped out of school again.

Yolanda and Esteban's daughter Cynthia–described by her younger sister Hilda as being the most "sensitive" of her siblings and the one most affected by their father's absence–dropped out of middle school the year before. We discussed this in our interview:

JD: And why did you leave?

I didn't like it.

JD: Did you like school when you were in Primary school?

Yeah.

JD: And did you do well in Primary school? What grades did you get?

I did okay. Not great, but not bad. I got like 8s[27].

JD: So what happened in Middle school?

I don't know. I just didn't like it anymore.

JD: Was it too hard for you?

No, it wasn't hard. I did okay. I just didn't like it anymore.

Whereas among young children sadness after a parent migrates may be temporary, during early adolescence, low levels of depression were evident in children's descriptions of apathy about their schooling.

Second, when teenagers misbehave it often directly affects their school performance. Schoolteachers I interviewed often complained of behavioral problems among children of U.S. migrants. When asked how migration affected their schools, the most frequent response was discipline. School employees used words like "aggressive",

[27] In Mexico, students are graded on a scale from 1 to 10. A 5 is generally considered a failing grade.

"lacking discipline", and "uncontrollable" and, only when pressed, would cite examples of good students who did not fit this profile. Moreover, most of the small schools I visited, where more than one in four students had parents in the United States, did not have social workers. Even larger schools that were mandated to have such social service support often lacked trained staff in these positions. Schools in rural Oaxaca are faced with changing demographics among their student body without the funding, training, and other resources to deal with the emotional consequences of family separation. Teenage children of migrant parents take their resentment to school. Teachers' only recourse for disruptive behavior is to send the students home.

Third, some students described being uncomfortable at school because of peer pressure (see Adler and Adler 1998). When one woman I interviewed in San Angel's husband was away, she said her eldest son had trouble with classmates at school. "The oldest boy said his classmates would tell him that he had no dad and that was why he never went to the school meetings. When he would come home from school, he would be sad and I would tell him no and say that he did have his father and we would spend the afternoon and evening looking at the pictures of him." Another mother in San Angel said that it was hard for her twins their first year of Middle School.

> They didn't want to study anymore and I felt bad. They would say that they felt bad because they didn't have their father and I would say that they shouldn't worry because I was going to support them always and they shouldn't worry about it . . . After I would talk to them, they would put more effort into it, but only for a bit.

Her 16-year-old son confirmed her account. “In school the other kids teased me because my dad was gone.”

Fourth, the most common sentiment expressed by children of migrant parents was that they lacked academic support from caregivers in Mexico. Mostly, this is because the majority of caregivers are grandparents with very low levels of education who are uncomfortable with the school system. Many grandparents do not read and write well so they are not able to monitor children’s work. Of the 37 caregivers I interviewed, 42 percent–all grandparents–could not read or write well enough to help their grandchildren with homework. Indeed, the illiteracy rate for elderly Mexicans in rural areas is high at 44 percent for rural men age 65 and older and 63 percent for rural women age 65 and older in 1990 (Ham-Chande 1995:35).

Children of migrant parents rarely felt that caregivers in Mexico were invested in their academic progress. Teachers told me that students sign off for their grandparents on homework that is incomplete and incorrect. Brian told me he lacked academic support since his mother left. “You see at school parents are supposed to sign off on our forms. And, well, my grandmother is often too tired to go. My uncle, the one who is supposed to do it, he is never available. So, what I do is sign the papers myself.” Brian was one of the few I interviewed who was doing reasonably well in school, so I asked who he goes to when he doesn’t understand his work.

> Nobody. I understand it on my own. Or I study the books. For example I now take Algebra and it is hard to understand. So today I had a test and tomorrow I have to

> study again. So what do I do here? My grandmother doesn't know, and my aunts and uncles don't either. I try to explain to the teacher but he doesn't want to hear it. And, well, no one else has studied a career that can help me with this. So, I explain it to myself from the book, I write it all out and I understand it little by little.

Brian's strategy might be the same if his parents were home since neither went to college, although both finished high school. Yet Brian attributed the loneliness he felt facing his schoolwork to his parents' migration. If his mother was around, Brian believes he would at least get her attention–if not the answers to his homework.

Grandparents may not be interested in their grandchildren's education because they have made it without school. A first grade teacher complained that three of his students live with grandparents.

> And these guys are of a different generation. They are grandparents who do not know how to read or write. They have a dogmatic character, which is very difficult to deal with . . . They are closed minded, like they don't want to accept new options. They will say, "It is that, teacher, I did not go to school". . . They don't want to accept new things.

Furthermore, schools in Oaxaca expect parents, or substitute caregivers, to be highly involved in children's schooling (Orden Jurídico Nacional, n.d.). The rural schools I visited organized mandatory parent-teacher meetings, implemented compulsory parental

review of homework, and required parents' financial and volunteer support of schools events. As schools are organized around parental involvement, the lack of interest or involvement of caregivers in children's education is something that children notice. One 14-year-old girl in San Angel told me that she missed her mother–who she claimed not to love–most when she is at school, especially on May 10th, Mother's Day. She told me they have a program at school and a formal dinner. I asked, "Do you go with your grandmother?" "No," she responded, "She doesn't like to go to those kinds of things at school." Because the schools that the children attend are organized around, and expect, parental involvement, parents' absences are especially hard.

Teenagers' Troubles and the Distribution of Family Resources

As is true among younger children, teenagers' reactions to their parents' absences may affect parental decisions about the distribution of family resources. When teenagers have behavior problems, some parents make the significant expense to return home to deal with their children. Nicandra, for example, returned twice in response to Tony's problems, at a total cost of over $7,000. She worked at a factory when I first me her, earning approximately $300 per week.

In addition, migrant parents often heavily invest in their children's educational expenses, especially for high school and college when the costs of schooling increase considerably in Mexico. Laura and Enrique went into debt to send their oldest son to study architecture in the university; he dropped out to migrate to the United States when he learned of their sacrifice. He worked in landscaping in New Jersey when I interviewed him. Paula sent money so both Cindy and Mateo could attend a private school and financed Mateo's first year of college only to have both children drop out in the midst of

their studies. She had dreamed of returning to Mexico once her children were professionals and that they would be able to support her through old age.

Migrant parents do not disregard the intense difficulties that their children experience during early adolescence. Instead, over time, I found that most migrant parents deliberated over how to most effectively respond to their children's needs during a seemingly tumultuous life stage. In this sense, their responses to their teenagers may be similar to those of parents who live with their children. A commonly held belief in the United States is that adolescence is a period of increased parent-child conflict (Laursen, Coy, and Collins 1998). Yet in the transnational context, the resources that parents have to respond to the conflicts with teenagers are different. More often than not, a response involves a large economic investment, especially for families with already limited economic resources.

In summary, I suggest that during early adolescence the consequences of migration–even when children do not actually move–are most pronounced (see also Artico 2003; Myers 1999; Smith, Lalonde, and Johnson 2004). Teenagers left behind in Mexico are generally more acutely resentful of their parents' absences during this stage even if they have lived apart from their parents for a number of years. Their dissatisfaction is most evident in three areas: ambiguous lines of authority, acting out, and school performance, which they, and others, describe as being particularly difficult due to parental absence. Yet, like younger children, teenagers are able to influence the distribution of the families' limited resources. The difficulties that they encounter are a serious cause of concern for migrant parents who consider their absence a sacrifice for the sake of their children's well-being. Migrant parents want to respond to their

teenagers' problems, but often are unsure of how to do so. They may funnel limited family resources into schooling, which does not necessarily enhance children's experiences or opportunities in their absence.

TEENAGERS

The negative behavior and resentment that children of migrant parents experience during adolescence appears to wane with time. As children grow into adulthood and begin to make decisions about their future, they describe resentment as fading into ambivalence regarding their parents' absences. While many do not entirely forgive their parents for being away, and separation has a lasting impact on their future and relationships with their parents as adults, once they have mature they stop feeling so distraught about family separation.

Older children of migrants identified a distinct stage of turmoil. One 19-year-old, for example, said she often felt resentful of her mother who left her when she was an infant.

> I was like 13 when I started to feel bad about not living with my mother. I saw all my friends talking about their dad or their mom and what they did together and since I didn't have them, I felt really bad.
>
> *JD:* And did it stay like that or change later?
>
> I changed–I stopped feeling so bad. It didn't affect me anymore.
>
> *JD:* When did this second change happen?
>
> Like two years ago.

For this young woman, like others, the crucial period was between ages 13 and 17.

Interviews with older children of migrant parents suggest that their ability to feel less hostile and more ambivalent about parents' absences is related to three factors: (1) a greater sense of responsibility as key players in the family migration strategy, (2) increased empathy towards parents after having formed their own romantic relationships, and (3) an emerging sense of economic responsibility related to entering the labor force.

Key Players in Family Migration Strategy

The young adults I interviewed whose parents' left them when they were older all described how important it was that they were able to understand the motivations behind parents' migration. For example, Trinidad contrasted her own experience of feeling helpless about her father's decision to leave for the United States, and not having been told that he had migrated, to that of her older siblings. "They understood what was going on . . . [but in my case] my mother basically did not want me to think that he had abandoned us." Her father Enrique eventually came back, and then migrated again when Trinidad was 17. She said his second departure was quite different, "Well, yes, I felt sad, but I was able to assimilate it. I understood that he had to go to work." Likewise, one 17-year-old I interviewed explained the different effects of her mother's departure on her and her siblings. "[It really affected] my younger bother and sister. But for us, the two of us older ones, not nearly as much. We can get used to anything." Her nine-year-old sister did not appear to understand her mothers' absence and was not able to explain why her mother did not come home.

Beyond the capacity to understand the family's migration strategy, young adults often described their family roles as expanding due to their parents' absences and their willingness to assume these roles as important to parents' decisions to leave. For example, an 18-year-old explained her mother's decision to join their father in the United States. "She asked me for advice. She asked me if I could help and take care of my brother and sisters and if she could count on it so she could leave." Tony also said he fully supported his mother's decision to leave multiple times. He described assuming full responsibilities for paying the family's bills as stressful, but added, "We will see that some day in the future, it will all be worth it."

Teenagers' work in the home often makes them feel like an integral part of the family migration strategy. After her father Enrique migrated, Cassandra had to help out more at home. "There was a time that it got so difficult that my mother decided to migrate also. I left high school so that I could take care of my siblings. I didn't finish school because I had to take care of them." Actually, Cassandra's mother Laura first went to Mexico City where she worked for another family and never tried to go on to the United States; instead she returned to San Angel to work locally. But still, Cassandra assumed much of the housework since her mother was away most of the day. She described spending entire weekends washing the family's clothes until her hands burned from contact with detergent.

> Since I am the oldest daughter, I felt responsible for everything because I didn't want my siblings to suffer. There were times that I had to act strong . . . because I felt like their mother. There were many things that I had to put up with because

> who could I talk to about it? I couldn't talk to Francisco [oldest brother], although I think now that he knew about it all as well.

Cassandra admitted at first feeling resentful for having to leave school to care for her siblings, but said, "Later it didn't matter to me that I made the sacrifice as long as my siblings and my mother were okay."

The contributions of young adults, particularly women, both in terms of increased responsibilities and physical labor, were significant to the maintenance of the family migration strategy. They also meant that women like Cassandra felt invested in the narrative of sacrifice inherent in the family migration strategy to a much greater extent than did children, like her younger sister Trinidad, who were younger when their parents departed. Their work and sacrifice, like that of migrants who worked hard in the United States, made it all possible.

As evident in Cassandra's case, many older teenagers felt pressured to leave school to help out at home after a parents' departure. In fact, a common complaint among teachers and school administrators was that their retention difficulties were due to the lure of migration, despite the fact that many students do not appear to drop out directly to migrate. For example, one director of a rural, satellite middle school attributed the school's severe drop out rate to students' aspirations to migrate to the United States. At the beginning of the year, 10 first-year students had pre-registered but only two remained in school in December when I visited. Yet of the eight drop-outs, the director reported that only three had subsequently migrated. The other five remained in town. Another middle school teacher in a nearby town explained they had a similar problem, particularly

among the boys. He said male dropouts don't necessarily migrate and there are no formal employment opportunities in town, but they leave school because they feel they have to take over the male role at home while the father is away. These patterns are consistent with Gioguli's (2004) findings that drop out rates among Mexican adolescents are 10 percent higher among children in migrant households than their non-migrant counterparts and that many adolescents, particularly females, are both not enrolled and not working.

Thus for young adults, particularly those with younger siblings, some amount of increased responsibility while parents are away often translates into greater investment in the narrative of parents' migration as a necessary sacrifice. Young adults' active participation in the maintenance of the family migration strategy, often at the cost of leaving school, means that they do not feel as resentful of their parents' decisions as younger children and teenagers.

Intimate Relationships

A sense of investment in the family migration strategy may help eldest siblings left as young adults to better adjust to separation from their parents. Yet even for younger siblings left behind as small children, involvement in intimate romantic relationships as young adults may help them to better understand parents' reasons for leaving and to feel less resentful of them for doing so. As Cassandra explained, "now that we are all married we are all more conscious of things and take everything with a greater sense of responsibility."

Romantic relationships can lead young people to become more responsible. According to Nicandra, Tony stopped being so difficult as a teenager once he starting seriously dating a girl in the neighborhood.

> Maybe it was because I sent him to therapy that he was completely reformed, but I feel that what settled him down more was his girlfriend . . . Now I see him really centered. He says, "Mom, how is it possible that you can be so unconscious of the harm you did before?" and I tell him, "It is just part of adolescence."

Tony also described his girlfriend as helping him to clarify his goals and plans for the future. First and foremost, Tony hoped to graduate from high school. At the same time, Tony wanted to start his own business in Mexico.

> Depending on what happens with my girlfriend . . . I hope that I can get a good job and save some money to buy a small business . . . I have talked with my mother about this and she is thinking of coming up with the money for the initial investment, but I want to do all by myself. I know she would be so proud of me.

Romantic relationships may also help young adults better understand the pressures their parents faced. For example, as a teen, 30-year-old Eric was often angry at his father for leaving the family behind. "I don't remember how old I was . . . I know I was in a stage, well, it was a difficult time to be far from my father . . . like I lacked the paternal figure." As an adult, Eric sees his father every year during the holidays. He said, "Well, we have had our differences. And we still do. But, now that I got married, I see things in a different way. I now analyze it all and see how we can all make mistakes." Managing their own relationships appears to help young adults better understand the

complicated nature of the parents' personal relationships that often precipitated decisions to migrate.

Entrance into the Work Force

Experiences in the work force also appear to reduce young adults resentment about their parents' absences. When young adults enter the work force they are surrounded by a more supportive peer culture. One 16-year-old male I interviewed said that he felt better now that he was out of school and working. "My friends now are different than before. When I was in school it was, like, the other kids would tease me because my dad was gone. Now if my friends ask me about it and I tell them I don't talk to my dad at all, they are like, 'Oh, sorry for asking.' " He explained his change attitude toward his migrant father over the past few years, "It is one thing to feel nothing, but it is another thing to feel anger. I don't feel anger [anymore] . . . Now, it is like how we say here, what is done is done."

Second, young adults' experiences in the workforce–or even considering the mere possibility of entering the work force–may help them come to terms with responsibility and potential economic hardship, and thus better appreciate the difficulties their parent have faced. One young woman in San Angel described how much pressure she felt to leave school to help support her family while her parents were away. "I was going to drop out . . . I kept thinking that the money is just not enough to cover [the family expenditures] and that I should go to work and help out." Similarly, a 19-year-old said she dropped out her first year in high school because it cost too much money to pay for the transportation and the supplies she needed for school. Cassandra explained how such a seemingly minimal expense can be extremely significant for young people who know

that the family budget is tight. “I remember how uncomfortable it was to ask for money to go to school.” Trinidad explained how significant work experiences can be to understanding the economic pressures underlying parents’ decisions to migrate. She said, “So when I started to work I realized how difficult it was to earn this money that everyone was always talking about and what my dad had labored so hard for.”

Third, when children of migrant parents begin to think about work, they are better able to understand the lure of migration north to fulfill economic necessity. A 14-year-old girl of a migrant father who lives with his new family in the United States, originally said she does not want to migrate because, “[My relatives] say that people live on top of each other there and they work all the time.” Instead, she wanted a career in Mexico. Yet when I asked if she thinks that she may end up migrating like so many others in San Angel have done, she acknowledged, “Well, yeah, maybe. Because I have siblings and they may need money to keep studying. I would go just for that reason: to make money so that I could help them out, not for anything else.” Similarly, an 18-year-old woman told me that even though she missed her mother, she would consider leaving her children to work in the United States. “Who knows? It might be necessary, even if I loved my children a lot, just like my parents thought it over very carefully before leaving.”

Even those young adults who told me that they had been previously resentful of their migrant parents considered migration to the United States as a probable option. Thus, 16-year-old twins each said they would be willing to leave their children to work in the United States despite having previously felt angry with their father for having abandoned them. One explained, “Well, it might be necessary because here there is nothing to do. There is no other way to get ahead. There is no work.” The other agreed

but added, "I would leave them to go there to make something more. I would go and save up my money and then come back and stay here." In essence, as children grow older they are better able to understand their parents' economic motivations for leaving them behind, and their parents' absences become less personally hurtful.

Accessing Parents' Social Capital

Not only does entering the workforce help young adults understand their parents' reasons for leaving them. It also may affect young adults' decisions about their own future. If the younger children I interviewed influenced parents by affecting their emotions and teenagers affected the distribution of family resources by having problems that parents needed to spend money to solve, young adults often pressured their parents' to finance their own trips to the United States. When young adult children reach a critical age of migration, their parents' migrant networks become a source of social capital.

Many families described a pattern in which children remained in Mexico until they reached a certain age in mid to late adolescence, at which point they joined their parents. For example, two grandmothers in San Angel had cared for multiple grandchildren; at the time of the interview the only one left in each grandmother's care was the youngest granddaughter; all the others had already migrated.

The experiences of migrant father Gonzalo and his son David[28] illustrate how parents' networks become key for young adult children who reach this critical age of migration. When I interviewed Gonzalo in New Jersey, he had just arrived from Mexico two weeks earlier. He explained that three years before he had given up the migrant lifestyle and returned to his family in Oaxaca, Mexico. "I put up this little plastics stand . . . I sold very little, maybe 200 pesos [$20] per day – it wasn't really enough to eat on. I

[28] Migrant father Gonzalo and his son David are not members of a family constellation.

was feeling down because the business wasn't doing well, but I had not thought of coming back north." What changed Gonzalo's mind was his 14-year-old son, David. David had left school a year before and was helping out his father at the plastics stand when he decided to go try his luck in the United States. "My son told me he wanted to go north, and if I didn't go with him, he would leave with his cousins. I didn't really want to come back, but I didn't want him [David] to come alone either. So I decided I had better come with him while I was still able to." During an interview the next day, 14-year-old David confirmed his father's story. "He said that I am going to give you the opportunity [to migrate] while I still can."

David told me that coming to New Jersey had been one of the most significant experiences in his life thus far. "I feel much more mature . . . Everything I do now is with a purpose." He was delighted, he told me, that a whole new world opened up to him. "There [Mexico], there is nothing to do to have fun, not like here where there are basketball courts and green soccer fields to play at." When I met him in New Brunswick, David had already started working, joining his father's landscaping crew. He lived with his father in an unfinished basement in the house a cousin of his father rents. David had yet to be discouraged by the living conditions. "Everywhere I go, I keep meeting family," he explained as his eyes glittered. From my field notes:

> I sense that this is part of [David's] great excitement of coming north–it is like waiting on the sidelines of a soccer game for years. Some people you get to meet when they come off the field, as David says he met some of his relatives who

went home to visit over the holidays. But now that he is here [in New Jersey] he has finally joined the game.

David's experiences suggest how important migration to the United States can be as a coming of age experience for young men.

Not all young men reach the critical age of migration as early as David did. Even though Paula's son Mateo first migrated at 14, he did not feel he benefited from his mother's migration networks until the second time he migrated at the age of 19. In fact, Mateo did not like the United States when his mother first took him north, and ended up leaving his mother to live with an uncle. While with this uncle in Texas he finished high school and learned English before returning to Mexico to study tourism in the university. Just two years later, however, Mateo dropped out of school and started to work again. Mateo told me that before coming to the United States, he had been driving a truck, liked the work, and was making good money. "Why did you come back here?" I asked. "Well, because my passion is cars. I like everything that has to do with cars. There I earned good money, like 1000 pesos [$100] a week, which is good for there, but it is not the same as I can earn here. So I really couldn't make any plans for the future, and here I can save money more quickly." Once Mateo left the university, his possibilities of saving for his future–like for so many others–were frustrated with low wage work in Mexico. Since his mother was already working in New Jersey, it was relatively easy for Mateo–as compared to others–to return to *el norte* when he wanted to save money for his future.

Variations in reaching the critical age of migration appear to be related to each child's individual experiences. Consider Nicandra's children Tony and Miguel. When I

interviewed the teens in Mexico during the fall of 2004, 19-year-old Tony was finishing high school and, inspired by his steady girlfriend of over a year, was convinced that his future lay in a stable job in Mexico. Sixteen-year-old Miguel, however, had dropped out of school the year before. Working full time at a grocery store, Miguel reasoned that he would make a lot more money if he joined his mother in New York City and asked her to take him there. More than a year later when I spoke with Nicandra she told me that she planned to send for her two boys over the next few weeks and had already saved up the money for their crossing. "What made me decide was the day Miguel told me that he felt lonely without me. I didn't want to bring him [here], but when he said this, I said yes, I am going to send for him." Apparently, once Miguel's migration plans were set, Tony–now having broken up with his girlfriend–did not want to stay at home by himself. "This was not my plan," explained Nicandra, "I always thought I would work until I could go back there. But now I guess that all of us will end up here." A month later, the family was reunited in New York City.

Reaching the critical age of migration was also a slightly different process for the young men and young women I interviewed. Young men often contemplated migration earlier than young women, a decision which had much to do with their lack of success in school and the expectation that they become economic providers. Facing few economic possibilities with low levels of education in Mexico, young adult men felt their prospects for future employment were more often than not in U.S. migration. One common pattern was for young men to migrate in order to save enough to marry their sweethearts in Mexico.

While young men's coming into the age of migration was directly related to becoming economic providers, young women's migration decisions tended to be complicated by the formation of new family relationships. For some young women, marriage translates into a direct route to the United States. Yolanda's oldest daughter migrated just two months after marrying a man who had previously been in California. One 17-year-old daughter to migrant parents in San Angel told me of her future, "I would like to get married and then go north with my husband to make our life together [there]." For other women, the route north via marriage is more circuitous, after a failed marriage. For example, one woman grew up in San Angel with her grandmother, as her parents had worked in New York City for a number of years while she was a teenager. She ended up migrating after her marriage to a drug user broke up and she was left with the full responsibility of her daughter. Since her parents had since returned to San Angel, they cared for her infant daughter when she left. Similarly, one grandmother in San Angel had three daughters who all migrated to the United States after their failed unions, leaving their children in her care. They didn't consider going anywhere else to work, such as Mexico City, "since their father was already working over there [United States]".

In fact, one in three mothers I interviewed in New Jersey grew up as members of transnational families (with a father and/or mother working away at some point in their lives). One migrant mother, for example, left for the United States when she got pregnant as a teenager; her own mother had been working in the United States and went back to Mexico to watch the baby so she could come work. Another woman left two children in Mexico to join her husband in the United States. As a child she said she had often cried

thinking of her father who lived in New Jersey. “When I arrived it was hard. I kept looking at the buildings and streets and imagined my father walking around the corner.”

Thus despite migrant parents’ hopes that their children will become professionals in Mexico with the support of their remittances, many children of migrant parents appear to follow in their parents’ footsteps by working in the United States as young adults. Once children left behind reach older adolescence, they reach a critical age of migration at which point the emotional difficulties of separation become less salient. In other words, when the economic benefits of migration begin to outweigh the emotional turmoil of the teenage years, resentment fades into ambivalence and the children of U.S. migrants take advantage of their parents’ social capital to make the trek north.

CHILDREN AND POWER

Close examination of the experiences of children left behind makes clear that Mexican children have a difficult time during periods of separation from their parents due to international migration. Children’s dynamic reactions to parental absences are meaningful in their own right. Their reactions to parental absence usually change over the life course. Indeed, parent-child relationships in Mexican transnational families are constantly in flux. Parents and children must adapt to each other’s changing needs over time, so that their relationships show significant variability over the passage of even just a few years. One could say this is similar in all families, yet there are distinct strains and difficulties in the transnational families I have studied. Because parents and children are living apart, and contact is infrequent and occurs most often over the phone, parents have many fewer cues to help guide them in reacting to their children’s changing needs. In

addition, role expectations that provide direction for parent-child relationships in many other settings are constantly thwarted in the transnational context. Just as experiences as low wage laborers often mean migrant parents cannot meet expectations of providing and caring from a distance, so too the emotional difficulties children have after their parents leave mean that they are often not able to meet parents' expectations of unconditional love, respect, and academic achievement.

Mexican children's reactions to parental absence are also meaningful in evaluating the nature of children's power, or lack thereof, within their transnational families. Over the past 20 years, an emerging area of research on childhood has focused on understanding children as autonomous actors creating their own social worlds as distinct from and in dynamic relationship to those of the adults in their lives (Corsaro 1997; Thorne 1995; Wrigley and Dreby 2005). According to Qvortrup (1999), the *new sociology of childhood* has been relatively divorced from traditional, structural approaches to understanding children's lives, which emphasize the economic and political inequalities these children experience in different societies. Ethnographic studies of children's social worlds have not, for the most part, been successful in describing how children's power, or lack of power, in family relationships and in other institutions relates to their families' relative position in the society in which they live (Wrigley and Dreby 2005).

A close analysis of children's experiences illustrates how in the transnational context children may be the least powerful actors within their families. Yet they do have some influence, both as intended recipients of the benefits families gain through international migration, and as independent agents whose divergent needs are intensified

by separation from parents. Children are symbolically central to migrant families. As discussed in Chapter 2, children are generally considered the focal point of Mexican family relationships. Parental obligations to children are paramount, and these obligations are embedded in the migration narrative. Parents migrate, first and foremost, in order to better fulfill their obligations to their children. Symbolically speaking, children may wield enormous power in shaping family migration strategies.

Indeed, scholarship on Mexican migration suggests that children may be important beneficiaries of parents' sacrifices. Research shows that at the aggregate level, children with migrant parents may have advantages over their non-migrant peers, presumably owing to the overall economic returns of migration. For example, scholars have found that child and infant health in Mexican communities is better among families with U.S. migrants than those without migrants (Frank 2005a; McKenzie and Hildebrandt 2005; Kanaiaupuni and Donato 1999). In addition, although the regularity of remittances varies greatly among families from different regions and with different post migration experiences, research shows that social networks developed during migration prove to be a uniformly important source of social capital for Mexican families (Cohen 2004). Indeed, my finding about older children's access to parents' social capital has been verified quantitatively, with the inter-generational transmission of migration experience greatest among families headed by migrant parents (Kandel and Massey 2002).

Of course, the family migration strategy, and the narrative of sacrifice it entails, is not one-sided. Accompanying parental obligations to children during migration are parental expectations that children will prove parents' sacrifices to be worthwhile. Yet I have found that doing so is extremely difficult for children left behind. For one, children

often find themselves in a relatively powerless position within their families. As family dependents, parents made the initial decision to leave, not children. The younger and teenaged children I interviewed were like other Mexican youth who "report that they have little influence on their family decision-making processes, with parents tending to make the most of the decisions" (Esteinou 2004:25). As minors, children left behind generally cannot directly receive parents' remittances at banks or money transfer agencies. Most did not know how much money their parents sent and did not make decisions about the spending of family resources.

More importantly, children left behind in Mexican transnational families had a difficult time adapting to their parents' absences. I have found that children may pay the emotional price of family separation over the long run, particularly as it affects their educational prospects in Mexico (see also Artico 2003; Gioguli 2004; Kandel 1998; Kandel and Kao 2001; Levitt 2001; Menjivar 2000; Salazar-Parreñas 2005; Smith 2006; Smith, Lalone, and Johnson 2004; Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie 2002). Like children of divorce caught in custody battles between their parents (Haugen 2005), children in Mexican transnational families may experience a disjuncture between their token role as the primary beneficiaries of migration and their actual experiences of power vis-à-vis the other members of their families.

Yet, although children are deeply affected by their parents' absences and have a difficult time living up to their parents' expectations, considering their experiences over time suggests that they are not completely powerless within their families. Like research that suggests that women's relative power in their family enables them to bargain for family resources (see Seltzer et al. 2005), children's relative power–as shaped by their

negative reactions to parental absences–affords them some bargaining power within their families. Their symbolic centrality to the family migration narrative affords them some ability to exert their interests within their families, even if through expressions of feelings of powerlessness. In the end, parents are often quite responsive to the problems their children experience.

Children left behind do exert influence in different ways and to varying degrees over their life course. Young children often express disappointment at parental absence through displays of emotional withholding. These displays affect the emotions of the adults around them, what other scholars have described as a process of "emotional transmission" (Larson and Almeida 1999; see also Smith-Lovin 1989). For the most part, young children gain access to parents' resources indirectly. Although also affecting adults' emotions, teenagers' difficulties at home and at school often make more direct demands on parental resources than do those of younger children.

As teenagers mature into young adults, their resentment fades and they feel a greater responsibility towards and investment in fulfilling supportive roles in the family migration strategy. Also, as they begin to consider employment, they invariably find that employment prospects are better in the United States than in Mexico. For children left behind in Mexican transnational families, a key component in the transition to adulthood (see Hogan and Astone 1986; Shanahan 2000) is reaching a critical age for migration at which point they may pressure parents to finance their migration. At this point, parents' ability to translate migration into human capital gains for their children has generally failed. Living in communities where a culture of migration abounds, young adults feel the lure of migration (Kandel and Massey 2002). Yet they have an advantage over other

youth in their communities in being able to access their parents' migration networks. Unlike teenagers whose problems motivate a redistribution of family resources, young adults benefit from parents' social capital. Parents' social capital inevitably leads north.

Chapter 7

OFELIA AND GERMAN CRUZ: STAND OFF

Despite parents and children's longings to be reunited, many young children and teenagers resisted migration and their parents generally did not overrule their children and insist that they join them in the United States. This unexpected, but fairly common, dynamic often lead to standoff between migrant parents and children left behind with periods of separation growing longer than families originally anticipated or economic constraints required. The standoff, I believe, arises from a combination of conflicting emotions on the part of children left behind and parents' efforts to be responsive to their children's needs in the context of limited available resources. No case better illustrates how such a dynamic evolves than that of Ofelia Cruz and her son German.

A MOTHER'S CONSTRAINTS DURING MIGRATION

I arranged to meet Ofelia at her New Brunswick home at six o'clock on a November evening in 2003. I had known one of Ofelia's brothers and her husband Ricardo for years. Among other things, they had both been students in one of the ESL classes I taught. I had never met Ofelia, however, and did not know that she and Ricardo had a son in the coastal town of Las Cruces, Mexico until I started interviews for this project. On this particular evening, I arrived at Ofelia's house to find that she was out shopping. I sat in the narrow living room where the TV a Cartoon Network program, making small talk with Ofelia's brother as a number of family members came in and out of the room. Later I learned they were relatives and also that Ricardo was home the whole time, but did not come down to meet me. In fact, I have not seen him again since

the days he played soccer with my husband, and my subsequent contact with his family has been purely through Ofelia and her kin.

After a bit Ofelia's brother left for his class at the local community college. His wife Chavela politely waited with me and told me about Las Cruces. Chavela said she had moved in with Ofelia's mother from the northern state of Jalisco when she got married. "I grew up in the city. We weren't rich, but we weren't poor either. There was always enough to eat and all I had to do as a child was worry about getting up, going to school and doing my homework . . . [Ofelia's] family is of a much more humble background. When I first got married, they all said it wouldn't last. But when I went to live in his [husband's] town, I got along very well with his mother. She is a really patient person. I learned how to cook, make tortillas, and do other things around the house. It was hard, but I learned. And I learned that my husband's family is much more united than my own."

Chavela's description was cut short when Ofelia arrived, lugging Wall Mart shopping bags. She giggled nervously upon finding me in the living room, excusing herself saying she thought the interview was an hour earlier. When I didn't show, she went out quickly to pick up some diapers for her three-year-old daughter. As if in proof, a chubby toddler with messy pigtails trailed her in from the street. Ofelia went upstairs to drop her stuff off and within minutes of her return, all others cleared the room to give us privacy.

Ofelia smiled and giggled again. "I have been asking everyone what they think you will ask me about." The laughter was not easy, but rather seemed a sign of her anxiety about being interviewed. It resurfaced every time we broached an emotionally

charged topic. I tried to reassure her and asked simply that she tell me a little bit about how she came to the United States and about her son who lives in Mexico.

"I came like everyone else," she offered, "because there is no work in Mexico. The economic situation is very bad and I wanted my family to get ahead." She explained that her husband was the first to leave. He worked in Los Angeles for about a year and Ofelia stayed with her own mother and newborn son in Las Cruces. This was a hard time for Ofelia. "It was really difficult not knowing where he was, since it was the first time we had ever been apart. In Mexico, when the women are washing they say, "watch out, you could be using your husband to wash your clothes (laughs). Since we don't know anything about them when they leave, we joke that they come back as [laundry] soap."

Within a year, Ricardo asked Ofelia to join him. Ofelia was eager to migrate to see the place where her father and brothers had worked for a number of years while she was a teenager. "You see, my father left when I was 13. He was in the United States for nine years before he went back. While he was away, it was my husband who was really the man of the house there in Mexico, helping out with the work. But just my luck, once I came to the United States, my father returned to Mexico. We crossed paths. I am the only one who doesn't know him. It has been 15 years now. Oh, how I want to see my father."

According to Ofelia, Ricardo wanted her to migrate with their only son, German. But Ofelia was concerned about where she would live when she got to the United States and who would take care of the two-year-old boy. At the urging of her mother, she left German behind and planned to send for him once she settled in the United States.

After Ofelia's arrival in California, the couple decided to move to Central New Jersey to live with her siblings. Ofelia started working at a factory; it was the first job she

had ever had outside of her home. “I felt really bad at first, it was like . . .” Ofelia struggled to find the words and instead laughed dryly. “But then at the factory where I worked I found out that so many women had their children in Mexico, and then I didn’t quite feel so bad, although I still really missed him, especially at the beginning.”

“Do you like working?” I asked.

Ofelia answered, “No. If I could, I wouldn’t work. I never worked in Mexico except in the house helping my mother out with things. But, you know, when you get older and get married you need to do things for yourself, for your own family. So, that is why I came to work in the United States.”

“Do you think you will miss working if you ever go back to Mexico?”

Again, Ofelia said that the work is not important to her. “It is not the work that people miss back there. It is that [there] no one pays you to sit around eating all day long. That is what everyone misses when they go back to Mexico, getting a check at the end of the week.”

“Everyday, everything in Mexico is more and more expensive,” she went on to explain. Recently, one of her brothers came back from visiting Mexico and told Ofelia that a pair of pants costs between 250 and 300 pesos (roughly $25-$30). She was shocked. For this reason, Ofelia explained, she feels satisfied that her earnings in the United States are helping support her son’s needs. “I know that he is missing the affection of his mother, but I also know that he eats well, that he doesn’t go hungry, that he has clothes and that he can study. I know that he is okay.”

At the time of the interview, German had recently turned nine years old. Ofelia had not seen him in over seven years. “I don’t have any recent pictures,” she explained,

"but when I first left my mother sent me pictures all the time. I watched my son grow up through photographs." Ofelia said she now calls home about once a week. Her son is the only grandchild living with her mother and father, and although she wants to bring him to the United States, they are at a stand still. She claimed that then nine-year-old German does not want to migrate and added that she is reluctant to take him away from her parents. "When I call him he asks me to come home. But he says he doesn't want to come here because he doesn't want to leave his mama in Mexico. You see, he calls my mother, mama. But he does know that I am his mother because he says so. He says, "I know you are my mother, but I don't want to leave my mother here." And I don't want to force him to do something he doesn't want to do, even though I know there are more opportunities here in the United States than in Mexico."

When I interviewed Ofelia, she had recently lost her job at the factory due to slow downs in production. Even though a trip to Mexico would mean having to make an undocumented crossing to return to New Jersey, Ofelia explained that if she didn't find something soon, she wanted to go home for the holidays. If not in December, she would travel back home in May. "Ricardo doesn't want to go home at all, but I do. I cannot wait to go back. But I would just stay for three months or so. This way I would have time to warm up to my son again so I can bring him back with me."

LIVING WITH GRANDMA AND GRANDPA

Ofelia never went back that year or the next. I first met German and his grandparents in 2004 when I visited their family home in Oaxaca. I had vague directions from Ofelia's brother who said I should look for the house across from the basketball court. We first drove by the ice-cream / arcade shop where a skinny, shirtless boy was

hanging out with four older men, and then doubled back realizing that we were in the right place and that the young boy must have been German. His grandmother, who I had talked to the day before to confirm my visit, wasn't there, German told us brusquely.

German's grandfather, also shirtless and in grubby pants, lay on a *petate* (a woven straw mat) on the dusty floor of the arcade. He instructed German to bring us chairs. Once seated, I was uncomfortable, feeling evaluated by these men to whom I didn't know what to say. German's wary eyes monitored me closely as well. I worked though the awkward silences in conversation with German's grandfather, Don Francisco, who had worked in New Brunswick for a number of years.

It wasn't until my second visit that I appreciated Don Francisco's gold tooth smile when we spoke more comfortably. He described himself as a homebody, spending most of his eight years away in the United States either working at an industrial factory job or holed up in his room watching TV. Don Francisco also explained that he was the first in the family to leave for *el norte*. He had been quite successful working abroad. The family used the money he sent home to move from a house in a nearby rancho to one he built in the town of Las Cruces. He and his wife were also later able to purchase the store where they currently live. They owned a number of cattle and also a palm tree grove. "I like life in the United States better than here because here it is so hot and there things are more orderly and they are cleaner," Don Francisco told me. He came back only because once his sons migrated, they stopped working his land, and it was beginning to lose value.

Doña Maria was more outgoing than the reserved Don Francisco. For this reason, it didn't surprise me that on subsequent visits she admitted that it had been hard living with Don Francisco again after he came back from the United States. "I didn't get used to

it, and I still don't," she commented with a laugh. Doña Maria, a woman filled with an often-contagious exuberance and energy, was well respected in town. She introduced me to the Directors at the local schools, all of whom she knew personally. On my visit during the town *feria*, there were a number of women in town who didn't speak Spanish were selling their wares. They all frequented Doña Maria's shop, since she readily allowed them access to the bathroom and to water.

On that first visit, I learned little directly from the then 10-year-old German. At most I confirmed that he did not want to join his parents in the United States, as he scoffed when I jokingly mentioned expecting to see him in New Brunswick in a few years. He also seemed suspicious of me. On the last day of our visit when we went to the beach, I mentioned to Doña Maria that German looked more like his father than his mother. German looked up from his soda at me warily, "So you really know my dad in the United States?"

"Yeah," I answered. "He was once in my English class and played soccer with some of my friends there."

"And what is his name?" German challenged me. He looked rather surprised when I successfully answered "Ricardo".

Five months later when I visited for the town feria, I learned more directly from German who still played it cool, but was noticeably excited when we arrived. On this visit he warmed up to us considerably, playing affectionately with my son Temo and talking more openly with me than he had on our first visit, agreeing to be interviewed. What follows are excerpts from our conversation.

JD: Who do you live with?

With my grandma.

JD: Anyone else?

The *señor* . . . my grandpa.

JD: And where does your mom live?

In the United States.

JD: And your dad?

There too.

JD: Do you remember living with them?

No, because I was two when they left me.

JD: Do you remember anything about them?

Just from pictures.

JD: Why did they leave?

To go where the money is.

JD: Do you talk to them on the phone?

Yes.

JD: How often?

Once a week.

JD: Do you talk to both of them?

Mostly with my mom. Not much with my dad because he works.

JD: Do you like to talk to her?

Yes.

JD: How do you feel when you hang up the phone. . .happy, sad, normal . . .?

Sad.

JD: Why?

Because they are on the other side.

JD: Do you want them to come back?

Yes.

JD: Do you want to go there with them?

No, I don't want to go.

JD: Why not?

Because it is cold [there].

JD: What's that about? When it's cold you wear gloves, a hat . . .

It's that I am used to living here.

JD: So you prefer that they come back?

Yes.

JD: And you don't want to go there?

Nah, I am all right here with my grandma.

JD: You have a sister there, right?

Yes.

JD: How old is she?

(calls to grandmother for the answer) Like two or three or something like that.

JD: Like Temo.

Yeah, like that.

JD: Do you talk to her on the phone also?

Yeah, sometimes.

JD: She can talk?

Yes, she talks – she just started to talk.

JD: Do you love your sister?

Yes.

JD: Sometimes kids tell me, the ones who are here, that they feel a little bit jealous of those that are born there. And you? Do you ever feel jealous of your sister?

Not me.

JD: Do you feel closer to your mother or your father?

Both the same.

JD: So do you feel like you need your parents or are you okay the way you are?

I feel like I need them.

JD: Why?

Yes, I need them because they are my parents.

Although German denied being jealous of his U.S.-born sister, Doña Maria told me later that German feels uncomfortable about his sister and this is one reason he won't let his parents send for him and insists that they come back to Mexico if they want to see him. "Once he said to me, gram, I think my parents love Stacey more than they love me."

Doña Maria confirmed repeatedly, on both my visits with the family. that German did not want to join his parents in the United States. "[German] talks to his mother about once a week. You know, they want to take him there. His father says they are ready to send for him. But he doesn't want to go."

I wondered if Doña Maria wasn't holding on to German. After all, German seemed affectionate with his grandmother, especially given his rather independent personal style. Moreover, German seemed to enjoy a loving environment, being the only child in his grandparents' home. Clinging to German, however, did not seem to be Doña Maria's style. Doña Maria had many friends in town and a clear identity independent of caring for her grandson. She often chatted and joked with those who passed her store and was frequently out hurriedly doing errands. On a day-to-day basis, she often acted indifferent to German, going about her daily routine with little intervention in German's activities. For example, during the town feria, Doña Maria was not concerned that the 10-year-old went off to see the rodeo with some friends. And, on the evening of the dance, German meticulously ironed his own pants and shirt to get ready to go out on the town. In short, Doña Maria's hands-off style did not seem to match Ofelia's concerns that her mother would feel lonely and abandoned if German left for the states. To this end, I asked Doña Maria how long she thought the current arrangement would continue. "Of course I will be sad for him to go," she answered. "But I cannot stop it because they are his parents and they should be with the boy. I know it is not the same to be [raised] by grandparents than to be with your parents. I am always conscious of this."

STAND STILL

Back in New Jersey some months later, Ofelia stopped at my house to pick up some pictures I had of German. She sat at the edge of my sofa that afternoon, shaking her head with a nostalgic smile while looking at her son playing on the beach. “You know, he doesn’t want to come,” she said abruptly while flipping through the pictures yet again. “We tell him to come, but he doesn’t want to. I wanted to bring him since the first year we were here, but he never wanted to. He is like resentful that we left him. Sometimes on the phone he says, ‘Mom, why did you leave me?’” I asked, “What do you tell him?”

“I tell him so that we could have more things, that he wants us to buy him lots of things and this way we can buy him whatever he wants. I tell him that if I hadn’t come maybe he wouldn’t have the things that he has and that he likes his things.”

“And what does he say to you?” I asked.

“He says it is okay. Then I tell him that if he comes here I am going to buy him lots of things too. But he tells me that it is better that I send the money there to buy things there. He says that I should go back there to get him.”

“Maybe you can win him over if you go.”

“Yes, that is why I tell Ricardo to go. He was going to go this month to get him. But since they say it is really dangerous, he couldn’t go.”

“Is that why you don’t go, because it is dangerous?”

“Yes, you see, when I came it was with papers. I didn’t cross like the others. I went to Tijuana and they gave me some visitor’s papers to cross with. And you see, because of the cost and everything, I can’t go back.”

OF STAGNATION AND CHANGE

Nearly a year later, when I returned once again to Las Cruces, the standoff between German, Ofelia and Ricardo remained unchanged. Although I had spoken with Doña Maria a few times since, I had not seen Ofelia or Ricardo again. I did, however, occasionally talk to Ofelia's brother and learned that his family life had radically changed as his wife Chavela returned to Las Cruces with their children to permanently re-settle the family in Mexico. Ofelia's brother planned to join Chavela and their children after he worked a few more years in New Jersey to help save for the expenses involved in finishing and furnishing their house and store in Las Cruces. So while Ricardo, Ofelia and German's relationships remained in a deadlock, those of other family members were in considerable flux.

On the first evening of my visit, I sat with Doña Maria out front in the humid evening while she sold tacos of *carne asada* and sharpened two boxes of 300 colored pencils I was using for a project at the local schools. When my hands grew sore, I convinced Chavela's son to help me. German joined us at the table to have a dinner of his grandmother's tacos, warily listening in while he ate as his cousin explained to me, switching back and forth between English and Spanish, that he missed almost everything about his life in New Jersey, especially his bilingual classes at school and the many city parks. The older German's facial expressions indicated that he was clearly in disagreement with his cousin over the virtues of life in the United States. After a customer moved on with his order of tacos, Doña Maria randomly told me about her taco sales and how much she made during the last town dance in December. German finished

his tacos, wiped his mouth, and declared, “That is just how I like it: a poor and humble house but with lots of money.” Doña Maria scoffed at his comment, aimed at his “Americanized” younger cousin. German laughed dryly and left the table, making clear his resistance to the corrupting capitalist influences of the United States and his preference for the more modest way of life in Mexico.

The next afternoon, I spent time in German’s school asking students to draw pictures of their families and how they imagined the United States. German’s class was small, just 12 students on the day of my visit. Now 11 years old, he was in the fifth grade and, though I knew he had been left back a year, he wasn’t old compared to the others. Later during recess, German’s teacher described him as being extremely popular with the girls, quite a flirt, and also a bit uncontrollable in the classroom. During the exercise German sat sectioned off with three other boys; they appeared to be the unruly boys of the classroom. But German was respectful during the drawing exercise and the others followed suit. While students drew their families, I went one by one to their desks asking whom they lived with and who in their family lived in the United States. The other three boys in German’s group of friends all had parents in the United States. When I came to German, I noticed he had drawn two figures: one he labeled “papa” and the other with the name of his young sister (whom he has had never met). I was struck that he had not drawn his mother. Later when he turned in his pictures, I saw that German had scratched out the name of his sister and replaced it with the label: “mama.”

That evening, Doña Maria sold tacos once again. We sat and chatted as on the prior evening. This time when German came out and declared he was hungry and wanted a cheese sandwich for dinner, Doña Maria snapped at him saying, “You are way too

young to be demanding things like that." German retreated inside to prepare his own sandwich.

Although at German's urging we had originally planned another beach trip that Saturday, at lunch on Friday, Doña Maria told me that she had not been able to change the catechism class for German's communion the next morning, so we would not be able to go to the beach after all. "Since his mother is not here," she explained, "I am the one who has to be there for him." When I told German that we wouldn't be able to go to the beach after all, he looked disappointed. I left the next morning. As Doña Maria accompanied me to the bus stop, Don Fernando and German were busy washing the truck. Don Fernando mockingly faked wailing at my departure, "When are we going to see her again," he cried and we laughed. I called out a goodbye to German, but he concentrated on cleaning the tires in the back of the truck, completely ignoring me. Doña Maria shook her head as we walked away. "You should have called out to him, 'see you in New Jersey'," she said, "then he would have responded."

When I spoke to German and Doña Maria on the phone from New Jersey a few months later, German answered and seemed happy to talk to me and chatted about the party his family threw for his communion. "It was a big party. There was a DJ," he reported eagerly. "My dad said that he would either put [money up] for a DJ or a cow [to provide the meat for the party] but then my dad put [money] for the DJ and my grandfather put the cow so I had both." After speaking some more about the party, German asked, "So when are you going to come again so we can go to the beach?"

"I don't know . . ." I explained. "Probably not for a little bit. When are you coming here? I bet you'll come here before I go there. . ."

I was surprised when German answered decisively, "April 30th."

"Really?" I asked.

"Yeah, my dad says he is going to send for me. I am going to go with my aunt. Antonio [Chavela's young son and German's cousin] is going to go back also."

"Wow."

"But I don't want to go," German added although the excitement in his voice seemed to betray this thought.

"Well, when you get here you can come to my house. I'll invite you out to eat and we can go to the beach here, although it isn't as nice as the one there."

After we spoke for a bit Doña Maria came on the line. We exchanged news, again of the party and also reports on who in the family had been ill. I then added, "So are they really going to send for German?"

"His father says that he is going to come back for German and take him to the United States. But I don't know. I tell them to wait until he finishes school. You see now he is in fifth grade and he just has one more year left to graduate so I think they should wait until he is done school."

"Oh. Well, German said he is going to come in April," I explained.

Doña Maria simply laughed and changed the subject.

April came and went. German remained with his grandparents. One of Ofelia's sister, a single mother, migrated to New Jersey and left two children, ages four and six, with Doña Maria. Although talk of German's migration still hung in the air, the next year he went on to the 6th grade in Las Cruces.

PARALYZED

How can we explain this dynamic between German and Ofelia in which neither mother nor son gets what they really want, to live with one another? It is possible that caregivers in Mexico, in this case Dona Maria, resist family reunification so they can continue to garner monetary benefits from parents' migration. As I will discuss in the next chapter, many grandparents rely on the remittances of their migrant children. It is also possible that caregivers like Doña Maria discourage children from migrating because of the close emotional bonds they develop with their grandchildren while parents are away. While both scenarios are certainly possible in some families, in the following chapter I also show that for the most part, the grandparents I interviewed believed that parent-child bonds are more important. They often acted in ways to emphasize these parental ties and responsibilities, as did Doña Maria when she told me in front of German that she had to go to his communion class because his mother wasn't there to go. If not arising from grandparents' interventions, why the stubborn stand off?

Ofelia and German's relationship is best explained by the conflicting emotions involved in parent-child separation that are generally not easily resolved. From the perspective of children like German, migrant parents are a presence even when physically absent. German feels that his parents are important to him, and he knows that they should provide and care for him. He feels resentful that they left him behind and now give more attention to his U.S.-born sister. At the same time, German understands that they have migrated out of economic necessity and, in part, to support him. He likes living with his grandparents and in Las Cruces. In essence, he does not want his life to change drastically, except that he would like his parents to return and show they care.

But for migrants like Ofelia Cruz, making a decision to return is extremely difficult. Her family in Mexico is dependent on remittances from the United States and would not have the same standard of living were she to go home. Moreover, she has ties in New Jersey via her U.S. born daughter. Ofelia reasons that she might convince German to join them if she could spend some time with him, but the constraints involved in undocumented migration make a short return visit seem an overwhelming risk. Thus, Ofelia also feels conflicted in determining what her best course of action is with German. As a result, in her family and others like them, mother and child remain in a stand off that is unlikely to be resolved except by time.

Chapter 8

CAREGIVERS

Like gender and the symbolic role of children in Mexican families, it is likely that the third feature of Mexican familism, dense networks with extended kin, is key to understanding parent-child separations during international migration. It is possible that while according to middle class, North American concepts of the family the separation of parents and children is a major event, a norm of shared child-rearing practices–or what anthropologists call child fostering–in Mexican families makes parent-child separation a fairly typical family survival strategy. Yet, as has been discussed, in the case of Mexican transnational families, the migration narrative places expectations on both migrant parents and children left behind that are often quite difficult to achieve and cause great emotional hardship. Somewhat surprising is that Mexican families are not better able to assimilate such separations by relaxing their expectations of each other given the context of highly significant extended family ties. In other words, if relatives are so important in Mexican families, why are they not considered suitable substitutes while parents are away?

In this chapter, I consider the experiences of the caregivers left in charge of children when parents leave. As the experiences of the wives of migrants were already discussed in Chapter 3, here I focus on those families in which children remain with non-parental caregivers. In fact, parents described a very limited set of choices in caregivers; they either picked, in rare cases, other relatives (such as aunts) or, much more commonly, grandparents. In the transnational context neither grandparents nor relatives generally

usurp the roles of parents in children's lives. Instead, relatives and grandparents most often act as intermediaries in relationships between parents and children. Thus their position in the migration narrative does not undermine parent-child bonds. In the context of often-lengthy periods of parent child separation, extended kinship ties tend to reinforce intergenerational obligations.

To explain why caregivers support parent-child relationships, I explore what Hansen (2005) has called as the "tangle of reciprocity" involved in transnational caregiving arrangements. First I describe the most common substitute caregivers, grandparents, and then turn to situations in which other relatives care for children. Next, I address the tensions that affect both types of caregivers' experiences over time. Finally I consider how the social construction of transnational care networks shapes relationships between members of Mexican transnational families. Note that while men figured into transnational family arrangements, I generally interviewed female caregivers in Mexico as no child was left solely in the care of a man, and women in the family were considered the primary caregivers. As such, I primarily use feminine nouns in what follows.

GRANDPARENTS

When couples leave children in Mexico, most stay with grandparents. Among the migrant couples I interviewed, 90 percent had children living with grandparents. Significantly, there was a strong preference for children to remain with maternal grandparents; in two-third of the cases, children of migrant couples lived with their mother's parents. Additionally, when single mothers migrate, their children stay with their own kin.

Maternal Grandparents

Migrants often described maternal grandmothers as the only logical caregivers for children they left behind. Illustrating the preference for maternal grandmothers as caregivers, one migrant mother explained "we left them with my husband's mother just because my mother has already passed away." Another migrant mother told me "I felt okay leaving them because I knew they would be with my own mother." One single mother in San Angel told me that she had often thought of migrating to the United States. "I thought of going in '93, but I didn't. What happened is that my mother got sick at the time I thought of going, so I couldn't go. Later she died … my sisters were here but I felt I trusted my mother more." Most migrant mothers implied that maternal grandmothers are, due to lineage, an extension of themselves and the best substitute for a mother's love. The child care choices of migrating mothers suggest that in Mexico the most acceptable replacement for unpaid family labor is maternal kin.

The prevalence of leaving children with maternal grandparents is curious given that anthropologists have documented the predominance of patrilocal residential patterns in the region of Mesoamerica from which the majority of Mexican parents I met migrate. Typically when a couple marries in southern Mexico, they will live with the husband's parents for a number of years until the couple can move out on their own (Robichaux 1997). As in Armando's family, we might expect that when mothers leave, children will stay with their paternal grandparents since they have presumably lived with them before. Conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, however, are common. Other research suggests that when husbands migrate, wives often prefer to return to their own parents' homes (D'Aubeterre 2001; Fagetti 2000). If children are in fact living with

maternal grandparents prior to a mother's migration, this helps explain the preference for maternal grandparents as caregivers.

Moreover, I found that mothers who leave children with their own kin seem better able to maintain stable relationships with them while away. Excluding children living with mothers or fathers and including those interviewed in both the United States and Mexico, in 26 families children lived with maternal kin and in 9 families children with paternal kin. Among those who reported weak relationships between mothers and children, two-thirds of children lived with father's family compared to 11.5 percent in the care of maternal kin. Of those who reported markedly close relationships between fathers and children, two-thirds of children lived with paternal kin in Mexico. It appears, then, when mothers leave children with maternal kin they secure more optimal conditions for maintaining an emotional bond with children from a distance. In other words, a mother's absence is less risky when her own family members support the migration decision.

Even in cases in which children lived with paternal grandparents, migrant mothers described stable home lives for their children in Mexico. They reported amicable relationships with their children's caregivers, and generally did not express serious concerns about their children's care. Ofelia summarized the prevalent attitude when she said, "I know my son is missing the love of a mother, but I also know my son doesn't suffer terribly without me, he has food, material things, and love from my own mother. It is more that I am the one who suffers without him."

Caring for Grandchildren

Many of the Mexican grandmothers in this study were instrumental in becoming the primary caregivers for their grandchildren. Migrant mothers often said that their own

mothers were the ones to give them the confidence to take the final step of leaving. According to one migrant mother, "I wouldn't have done it [if it weren't for my mother]. With my mother I know that they are okay. She is a little strict, but it is better that way." A grandmother in San Angel reported that the act of leaving children signified the trust between mother and daughter. She said her daughter told her upon leaving, "I am giving you my daughter because I know that you will take care of her."

Grandmothers, for the most part, actively encouraged their daughters to leave their children to be cared for in Mexico. Nancy said that when she left Acapulco to join her husband in California, she wanted to bring her daughter along. Her mother convinced her that at a mere 90 pounds, and after bouts of depression after her husband left, it would be physically impossible to carry her 30 pound two-year-old daughter when walking across the border. A grandmother in San Angel explained that she convinced one of her daughters, a single mother in the United States, to send her granddaughter back to Mexico. "I told her it would be better for her to send me the girl. I convinced her that it was better for her to send her back." When I asked her why she had done so, the older woman explained, "Because I was worried that they were going to take her to someone there and you don't know how well they will take care of her. They aren't family." Similarly, another grandmother proclaimed, "As I tell my daughter, if it is hard for me to care for them and they are my own blood, how are you going to pay someone else over there to watch them when you don't even have a stable job?"

As has been suggested in studies of West Indian child fostering (Soto 1987), many times women described children as their most prized possession and suggested that leaving them with kin was a way of cementing intergenerational bonds. However, in

Mexican transnational families, this dynamic was not confined to mother-daughter relationships. Fathers also expressed trust in children's grandmothers as caregivers. Armando told me, for example, that he felt confident when he decided to send for his wife because his children would stay with his own mother. "They are fine with my mother . . . I felt the same [after my wife joined me] because I know my mother is a very responsible person. I trust her a lot." Even when children stayed with maternal grandparents, migrant fathers spoke of their confidence in the child care arrangement.

In addition, some of the Mexican grandmothers I interviewed described their husbands–the children's grandfathers–as being decisive in determining the child care arrangements. One grandmother in San Angel explained it was her husband who instructed their daughter to leave their four-year-old granddaughter behind because "who was going to watch her over there." Another said that her migrant husband in the United States told her to take care of her grandchildren when he decided to send for his daughters after they had marital problems. And one of the few grandfathers who sat with his wife to be interviewed, told me, "It is more important, and safer, that they be raised here because over there everyone works and it is important for children to have someone looking after them."

While maternal grandmothers are the preferred substitute caregivers, paternal grandparents may also influence the placing of grandchildren in San Angel. For example, one grandmother explained that her adult son had been to the United States once before. The first time his wife joined him, the couple's two sons stayed with her. Then, the couple returned to town and had another baby. When her son left again for Nebraska and his wife followed within a few months, the grandmother explained, "I told her [daughter-

in-law] it was better for her to leave [the baby] with her mother because he was so small, and that I would keep the older boys." In the relationship between mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws a shadow of a man (son/husband) is nearly always present.

If children in the West Indies are considered "women's wealth" (Soto 1987:134) and child fostering a way of cementing inter-generational ties between female kin, children in Mexican families are the wealth that unites a man and woman. Indeed, for a number of older couples, the tie that binds them in old age seemed to be their grandchildren. One couple I interviewed together, for example, defended each other in describing the difficulties they had raising their teenage granddaughters. Doña Ana, as described in Chapter 1, struggled at times with her husband's alcoholic habits, but praised his great attention and interest in raising their grandson Kevin. And the independent Doña Maria told me a number of times that it has been difficult for her to get used to her husband Don Frrancisco living with her again–now back in Mexico for nearly 10 years–after he was away in the United States for the same length of time. I rarely saw the couple talk directly to each other, but grandson German was comfortable with each. I watched him alternately wash the family truck with his grandfather and go on errands around town for his grandmother. Thus, children not only cement ties between their mothers and fathers; when parents migrate and children stay with grandparents, care for children binds men and women of different generations to each other.

Economic Benefits of Separation

Remittances from adult children working abroad were an extremely important source of support for many of the older people I met in San Angel. Statistics suggest that migrant workers' economic contribution is perhaps most important for elderly women

living in rural areas like San Angel. In Mexico in 1990, 69 percent of men between the ages of 60-64 but only 9 percent of women in the same age group were economically active. The gender disparity in economic activity was even greater in rural areas, where 75 percent of men from 60-64 were active compared to only 6 percent of women (Ham-Chande 1995:44). Many elderly women do not have the support of economically active husbands. While 87 percent of men aged 60-64 were married, only two-thirds of women were (Ham-Chande 1995:38). In addition, the social security system in Mexico is not universal, but administered by a number of different organizations covering different classes of workers. Based on 1990 statistics, Ham-Chande (1995:52) estimates that 82 percent of elderly individuals in Mexico lack pension benefits. "The more impoverished population sectors are those which also lack the power for negotiating such benefits. This has prevented the creation of pensions and retirement plans for the rural sector, the few independent workers, the unemployed and the underemployed" (Ham-Chande 1995:48).

Faced with economic hardship in old age, grandmothers may actively encourage their daughters and sons to leave children in their care for economic reasons. By keeping children, grandparents are able to stake a claim to migrant parents' remittances. In the name of their grandchildren, grandparents are better able to garner some of the benefits of international migration. In fact, a number of grandmothers I interviewed had numerous children living in the United States and had cared for multiple grandchildren over the years. All reported that those responsible for sending money home were invariably those who had left children in their care. In one case, one grandmother had raised a total of 10 grandchildren, and 9 of her 10 children lived in the United States. At the time of the interview, only one 14-year-old granddaughter remained in her care. The only person

who regularly sent her money was the 14-year-old's mother. However, since she had cared for so many different grandchildren, the responsibility of providing for her had been distributed among a number of her migrant children over the years.

While money is a motivation for grandparents to offer to care for grandchildren, only a few felt they achieved economic stability through remittances. Doña Ana said she and her husband were able to raise their grandson Kevin because "although it [amount of remittances] is little, it is enough because it is just two of us and the boy." Nydia's mother and father also raise and sell chickens for a living. Doña Adelaida was the other grandmother who said she had enough for her grandson Juan Luis. She lived with him on a property adjacent to where one of her sons owned and ran a carpentry business and thus was able to help look after her.

For the most part, grandparents described on-going financial difficulties despite the support of remittances. In fact, it seemed that regardless of the amount sent home, grandparents did not feel they had enough to adequately cover the costs of living. One grandmother said she receives $200 per month and explained, "That is not enough to raise four children." Another's husband worked as a taxi driver and also had a small corner store to help support one daughter and two grandchildren in her care. She received between $100-$200 per month from her migrant daughter, but said it is just enough for her to pay for the medicine for her chronically ill grandson. Yet another grandmother and her husband in San Angel had owned a corner grocery store for over 20 years. But, she said, they never make a profit; instead sales only helped to cover food expenses for the family. Her daughter, a single mother, sent just $50 home per month. "It isn't enough, but we do what we can."

In fact, grandparents said they were extremely reluctant to ask their migrant children for money. Most said that when they don't have enough money they cope on their own. According to one grandmother, "they [daughters] send me money twice a month. It isn't enough. . . But, no, no I don't call them [when money is tight]. I get the money here on loan." At least in San Angel, money lending within the community was the preferred way of dealing with economic shortage. As an example, when I finally caught up with Doña Dalia[29], who cared for two children and four grandchildren, to arrange an interview, it was just after I noticed two other women at the house. I returned the next day at 9 AM at Doña Dalia's request, but as I turned the corner of her street, I saw the same two women receive no answer at the door. I immediately feared I would have trouble finding Doña Dalia again, but after waiting patiently at the door for a time, it eventually opened and she let me in. Now entertaining a guest, Doña Dalia left the door to the street ajar. About a half hour later, the women returned, but Doña Dalia dismissed the women–who I now understood to be debt collectors–quickly at the door, telling them, "They haven't sent me any money yet." Later Doña Dalia told me that since her daughter left nine months ago, she has sent three packages of clothing and between $100-$150 per week. Doña Dalia lauded her daughter's commitment, apparently sending more than Doña Dalia's own husband, "She sends clothes and shoes and since she learned that her sister left [leaving another grandson with Doña Dalia], she sends things for him also." Nonetheless, "It is not enough, but what can I do."

In fact, grandparents were extremely reluctant to report their economic hardships to migrant parents. This was true for Armando, who was shocked to see how skinny his children were when he returned to Mexico and complained that his mother never reported

[29] Doña Dalia is not a member of a family constellation.

any trouble regarding their care. Instead, grandparents preferred to highlight how well children were thriving under their care. According to one grandmother:

> [My son] sends between $150-$200 every two or three weeks. Depending on what he sends, I take good care of his children [three boys]. They are all well fed. For example, I give them each a whole fried fish to themselves two or three times a year. I give them their sausages and I buy them the milk that comes in the box [as opposed to powdered milk]. When he sends money, I buy a whole carton of milk boxes so that every morning they have a cup of milk before school. And I give them a sandwich before school. They also get 5 pesos [50 cents] each so that during break they can buy whatever they want so they aren't hungry the rest of the day.

One reason grandparents put a positive spin on their grandchildren's care despite feeling they lack economic resources may be their fear that migrant parents will decide to send for the children, thus depriving the grandparents of remittances. It also may be that grandparents understand that it is difficult for migrant parents to send money home as they work in low wage jobs and may have multiple obligations in the United States. They may also not want to worry migrant parents who are, after all, their own children. Finally, grandparents may fear that if they complain of economic hardship, migrant parents will take away their grandchildren, with whom they often have developed significant emotional bonds.

Emotional Ties

Migrant parents reported that one of the reasons they had not sent for their children was that they did not want to leave their own parents alone, without the company of grandchildren. Indeed, grandmothers, supported by their husbands, not only encouraged their daughters and sons to leave grandchildren behind, but they often discouraged migrant parents' efforts at reunification. According to one migrant mother, her mother-in-law "says they are fine there. She doesn't want us to bring them here because they have always been there with them." Sylvia said, "My parents dissuaded me from the idea [of bringing them over]. And the idea of pulling them out of there from one moment to the next seemed a difficult one." One grandmother who cared for 3 grandchildren and whose husband lived in the United States near the children's mother said, "He [husband] says that there the children don't have any freedom to play and only stay cooped up in the house. He doesn't want her to take them. He tells his daughter that he doesn't want her to end up in jail because that is what they do there if you leave children home alone." In fact, I had gone looking for this grandmother twice before finding her at home for an interview; both times she was out and the six children in her care were home alone in the two-bedroom house.

Many grandparents described with pride the loyalty their grandchildren showed them. Doña Maria, for example, laughed when recounting how concerned her grandson German gets when she is ill, nervously tending to her by asking, "What can I do?" "Do you want soup?" and "Why don't I take you to the doctor." One grandmother reported that she doesn't read or write well enough to help her grandchildren with homework, but beamed in explaining that her six-year-old grandson says, "Don't worry, mama, I am

going to study hard and learn well so that I can help you do the books for the store." Another grandmother laughed with pleasure in telling me of her grandson's attachment to her:

> Then sometimes he would come home from school and he would caress my breasts and he would ask me what it was like when he would drink from my breasts. I told him that he didn't drink from my breasts, that his uncles yes, but not him. And he cried and cried saying why didn't he drink from my breasts. So I thought better of it and told him, yes, that he did, so that he wouldn't cry anymore.

Yet despite the clear emotional attachment grandparents developed with the grandchildren in their care, grandparents rarely questioned biological parents' attachments to their children. Some believed children should live with their own parents and that they, at best, were mere substitutes for parents' love. As Doña Maria said, "I know it is not the same to be with your grandparents as to be with your parents. I am always conscious of this." Others would prefer to continue living with their grandchildren but uniformly recognized that parents have ultimate rights over their children. According to one grandmother, "Well, how are we going to want her [granddaughter] to go? But, if her mother decides to take her, what can we do?" Another said that she won't let her two grandchildren join their parents in New York City unless they come back to town for them. "But if they come for them, I know that they have a right over their own children." A grandmother in San Angel explained:

> [My daughter] wants to take her [granddaughter] now, but she [granddaughter] doesn't want to go. My heart and soul splits in two when I think of the day that she will leave. But I know I will have to let her go at some point and I will let her go because it is right for her to be with her mother. But I will only let my daughter take her when she decides to go . . . I am not going to let [my daughter] take her against her will.

In effect, one reason that younger children are able to resist migration successfully–as described in the previous chapter–is that they find support from their grandparents to do so.

Grandparents' worries about parents' plans for children's migration often reflect, at least in part, a genuine concern over how the children will react to reunification. They want to ensure that their grandchildren are emotionally and developmentally prepared to migrate. In essence, they are closer to understanding the needs of their grandchildren than migrant parents as they have been living with them, and feel confident in advocating for those needs to parents.

Grandparents are not the Same as Parents

It is not surprising that grandparents are ever mindful of migrant parents' rights to children, as the bonds between grandparents and grandchildren are viewed as distinctly different from those between parents and children. Fathers are expected to be role models for children, providing both discipline and examples of good behavior. Mothers are supposed to ensure, among other things, that children eat well, are clean and well dressed,

behave properly and receive adequate affection. When it comes to grandparents and grandchildren, families described a bond based on unconditional love. Migrants valued their own parents as the best substitute caregivers because they believed that living with grandparents, their children would have a loving caregiver.

Migrant mothers, grandmothers and children all described grandparents as being decidedly more indulgent than parents. One migrant mother whose two daughters live with her mother-in-law explained, “It isn’t the same [when they are] with grandparents. The grandparents may feed them, but they don’t insist. If the children don’t want to eat, they don’t eat. But a mother insists that [her child] eats and then knows that he eats well.” A grandmother caring for two grandsons in San Angel described her relationship as follows. “I have them very spoiled. Anything they ask for, if I have the money, I give it to them.” Her seven-year-old grandson told me that living with his grandmother was different from living with his parents “because when I lived in the other house they wouldn’t give me money and here they do . . . here they spoil me more.” An 11-year-old described life with her grandmother as different thanwith her mother. “My grandmom sometimes tells me to hurry up and do my work because if I don’t she won’t give me money. And my mom [when she was here], if I didn’t hurry up, she would hit me.”

In fact, most grandparents said they did not use physical punishment with their grandchildren and that this was one of the major differences between raising one’s own children and grandchildren. Doña Beatriz was in her early 50s when I met her; for three years she raised her oldest daughter Sylvia’s three young children alongside three of her own children with all six under the age of ten. From my field notes:

> Beatriz says there are some important differences between raising her children and her grandchildren. She treats the children all the same–all equally in the sense of justice. However, while she might hit her own children to discipline them, she wouldn't physically discipline her grandchildren. In addition, it was hard at the beginning for the two older children born in the United States to get used to her routines in Mexico. For example, the older girl expected the grandmother to get her clothes out for her and dress her in the mornings. Beatriz says she had to condition her to be more independent and do things on her own, as her own children do. She instructs the children to put away their own things, their own clothes, and to be independent as one of many children.

Aside from treating grandchildren more lightly, or spoiling them more than their own children, the other difference in parenting is an emphasis on independence, as described by Doña Beatriz. Grandparents spoil their grandchildren in terms of giving them what they ask for, but expect them to be more self-sufficient than their parents do. Another grandmother I interviewed, like Doña Beatriz, cared for her son's three children all born in the United States who came to her when her daughter-in-law left her son for another man. She said:

> When they were with their mother, the older boy told me, she would buy them candies and lock them in the house and go out with their boyfriend. She wouldn't leave them food, just junk, and when they arrived their teeth were full of cavities. I had to teach them how to eat real food, beans and tortillas. I also had to wean the

> younger two boys of their bottles, and potty-train them, because they were still in diapers and took a bottle with them wherever they went.

This grandmother was proud of how she has helped change the boys' eating habits and also instilled in them a sense of responsibility. "Now they can do things on their own," she explained. "By themselves they take their bath, and they know where their clothes are. They get dressed alone and even wash their own shoes."

Summary

Members of Mexican transnational families see the roles of grandparents as different from those of parents. Grandparents tend to spoil their grandchildren and treat them more gently than their own children by not, for example, using physical punishment as they might have done with their own children. Grandparents also feel it is their job to teach their grandchildren to be independent. Most love their grandchildren dearly, but are ever mindful that biological parents have the ultimate rights over making decisions about children's lives. If anything, grandparents only intervene in parent-child relationships to ensure that migrant parents respect the wishes of grandchildren. Moreover, grandparents rarely express their own self-interest in parents' migration. Grandparents benefit financially from caring for grandchildren, albeit less than they had hoped, but rarely ask migrant parents to send money for the children's care. Instead, they highlight the ways children thrive in their care. This may be because they benefit emotionally from living with their grandchildren. It also may be that grandparents do not want to jeopardize their access to remittances. However, grandparents do not believe their strong relationships with grandchildren justify parents' prolonged separation from their children. The only

factors grandparents believe validate parent-child separation are the best interests of the child, such as greater stability or more attention in Mexico as opposed to in the United States.

OTHER RELATIVES

When grandparents are caregivers, the costs and benefits of child care arrangements for caregivers are subtle and subsumed under the expectation of a loving bond based on grandparents' "natural" tendency towards indulging their grandchildren. In contrast, child care arrangements when other relatives are caregivers are much more explicit. In only a handful of families did children stay with relatives other than grandparents; I only met six families (three in Mexico and three in the United States) in which children lived with such relatives. In one case, a woman was taking care of two U.S.- born nieces just for a few months. Both of the girls' mothers had returned to Mexico for the holidays; when both women returned to the United States illegally they decided to leave their daughters in Mexico until they could send plane tickets. In a sense, this was a case of an extended vacation.

For the most part, migrant parents avoided leaving children with other relatives whenever possible. Ties to extended kin and *compadres* may be important in Mexico and the social networks they provide may be key for facilitating migration. However, these ties do not appear to be strong enough to be considered suitable for the care of children in the transnational context. When parents did end up leaving children with other relatives, it was usually due to a lack of other options. This was particularly true for single mothers, who appeared to rely on these relatives more often than married mothers (although

precise statistics are not reliable given the small sample size). Moreover, the terms of child care were generally agreed upon in advance and often were much more carefully monitored by migrant parents than when children remained with grandparents.

Only if You Must Go

Unlike grandparents, other relatives generally did not actively encourage migrant parents to leave children in their care. Some agreed to help because they recognized that single mothers were in a bind. For example, one migrant mother moved in with her sister, also a single mother of two, after her husband left her for another woman. After working for a few months cleaning hotel rooms and barely earning enough to survive, this mother's siblings living in the United States helped her migrate. She left her children with the sister in Mexico and sent money home to support her sister and all four children. For the most part, however, other relatives were reluctant to take on the responsibility of caring for other children. One migrant mother, for example, joined her husband in the United States after he had been away for a time, leaving two daughters, ages six and nine with her sister-in-law. When I asked, "How did you decide that the girls would stay with your sister-in-law?", she explained:

> My husband decided. My sister-in-law didn't want to take them. She said that the children are going to suffer. But then she said yes, but only accepted it for a year.
>
> *JD:* Who made the arrangements with her?

> I told her to talk to my husband about it . . . the girls didn't want to live with their aunt either. They wanted to stay with their grandmother, my mother-in-law because my mother passed away. Then they asked to live with their godmother, but I had to tell them no because their father had already decided that they would live with their aunt and that was the way it would be.

When other relatives decided to take care of migrant parents' children, they did so out of obligation to migrant parents. In contrast, grandparents felt equally obligated to both migrant parents (their children) and their grandchildren.

Primarily Financial

When other relatives cared for children, the economic terms of the child care arrangement were almost always more explicit than when children stayed with grandparents. One aunt broke down in tears when she told me that her own now-adult children who migrated to the United States rarely send her money and she is forced to sell fruit to make ends meet. Because children's obligation to their parents is an ambiguous expectation, she was hurt when they did not provide for her. In contrast, she said her migrant sister sent 1000 pesos ($100) per month while she cared for her nephew. "She knows she has to send money for his expenses." In another case, the migrant mother described in the previous paragraph did not know what financial arrangements her husband made with her sister-in-law, but said that every time she calls to talk to her daughters, her husband spends much of the 20 minute phone call discussing these arrangements. Even the aunt who was watching her nieces just temporarily said of her

sisters, “Oh they know they have to send money for their expenses. Last week one of my sisters sent money and now we are waiting for the other one to.”

Remittances to grandparents were seen as part and parcel of inter-generational responsibilities, and migrant parents implicitly trusted that grandparents would spend the money wisely, always keeping the best interests of grandchildren as a priority. However, I found relatively high levels of distrust over whether remittances would be used to support children when they stayed with other relatives. For example, Paula emphasized on numerous occasions during our conversations the ways she ensured that those responsible for her children in Mexico actually spent the money she sent on her children. When daughter Cindy left Paula’s uncle’s home and moved to a different city with a family Cindy knew from Oaxaca, Paula explained the specific terms of arrangement carefully.

> I send the money to him[father in the family she’s staying with]. And he is a good person because at home, since they knew my daughter, I could send money to the telegraph office in her name. But in the city, I can’t because she is a minor. So he said I can send the money to him, and I just tell him how much is for him and how much to give to her and he will give her every last penny. And my daughter has told me that he gives it all to her . . . he gives her all that I send for her.

Not only did migrant parents like Paula often make careful financial arrangements to ensure that their children would be provided for when children did not live with

grandparents, but they also did their best to monitor these arrangements closely from abroad.

Emotional Ties

Other kin generally did not view emotional bonds with migrant parents' children as a potential benefit of the transnational child care arrangement. This did not mean that they did not become attached to children in their care. One aunt said that she would be sad to see her nieces leave. "Well, I think I will feel bad, and that is why I am trying not to get used to them too much." Another aunt explained that, "I thought of [my nephew] as my son. I cried a lot when he left." Cindy and Mateo told me that they have two mothers and love both women. Blanca–their second mother–recalled fondly that after Paula's first trip to the United States, Cindy did not recognize her biological mother and instead asked Blanca, "Who is that woman who is going to live downstairs in our house?"

During one interview, an aunt who had previously cared for her nine-year-old nephew while her sister was in the United States broke down in tears. Not only had she grown close to her nephew and felt badly when he left, but she was offended that her sister did not consult her about her decision to send the boy to Mexico City to live with another sister. One day, she simply got a call and was told that the boy would be moving out. She was upset and so was her nephew. She admitted that the boy was a handful and got in trouble in part because she worked and could not supervise him as she would have wanted. She also said that she believed he was doing better in Mexico City. What hurt the most was that she was not consulted in the decision-making process.

Powerless

This aunt was not the only one whose advice was ignored. Blanca also claimed that when Paula decided to return to the United States and take Mateo, she warned Paula that it would not be a good idea. "I told her that it would be more difficult there with him and that what would he do while she was working. But she insisted on taking him. She said I am taking him and she left." Blanca implied that Mateo's difficulty in adapting to life in the United States and his subsequent return to her home in Mexico was evidence that she was correct. Eric's, Osvaldo's and Edwin's[30] mother also appeared to be ignoring the advice of her children's caregivers in Mexico. She had recently decided to send for Eric at age 11, which was causing emotional turmoil for the brothers, particularly Osvaldo who broke down crying when the imminent departure of his older brother came up. According to the boys' cousin:

> The older boy doesn't want to go. He said no because of his brothers. But it is that his mother controls him psychologically–did you see how he answered you? Now he told you that he wants to go so that his mother isn't so alone. And that is exactly what she told him on the phone the other day. It is as if she convinced him. . .
>
> My father doesn't want the older boy to go. He says that since my aunt is over there alone and working that the boy will end up being alone. He says that there

[30] These boys are not members of a family constellation, yet their story has been told in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 and is also featured later in this chapter.

will be no one to take care of him and that the boys are going to come back [to Mexico] all gangster-like.

Relatives' feelings of powerlessness in advocating on behalf of the children in their care contrasts with grandparents who felt that speaking on children's behalf was their only means of influencing migrant parents' decisions. It is possible that this arises from migrant parents' general distrust of other relatives' motivations. While migrant parents believed that grandparents would put the interests of their grandchildren above self-interest, they considered either self-interest or pity to be the core of the child care arrangement with other relatives. As such, migrant parents considered advice from grandparents carefully, but generally ignored advice from other relatives because they believed financial motivations, rather than emotional ties, could underlie the advice.

Summary

Explicit in arrangements with relatives was the specific exchange of remittances for child care. Indeed, other relative caregivers tried to avoid developing lasting emotional bonds with the children in their care. They often felt powerless in influencing migrant parents' decisions regarding the care of their children. Moreover, migrant parents seemed inherently distrustful of these relatives' motivations and monitored child care arrangements more carefully than they did when grandparents were caregivers. Migrant parents might have been justified in doing so. Relationships with other relatives are often fragile and short-lived. As I describe in the following section, overt conflict with other relatives often led to the dissolution of these arrangements.

RISKS TO RELATIONSHIPS OVER TIME

The sources of tension in child care arrangements over time differ depending on whether children remain with grandparents or other relatives. When children live with other relatives, conflicts almost always arise from distrust over the exchange of care and money. In contrast, financial considerations do not cause strains when caregivers are grandparents. Instead, it is grandparents' physical ability to care for children as they grew older or mothers' jealous feelings over children's increased attachment to grandparents over time that cause pressure on these caregiving relationships.

Paying for Care

The most common source of conflict with other relatives stem from concerns that the terms of the child care arrangement are not being fulfilled, either by the migrant parent or the relative caregivers in Mexico. Parents often doubt that their children are receiving sufficient care given the remittances being sent for this purpose. Relatives, for their part, may feel that parents are not sending money regularly enough and in sufficient amounts to cover their expectations of care for their children. While I heard rumors that the misuse of money was a problem for migrant parents, all those whose children lived with grandparents denied this. For example, when I asked one migrant father of two children living with his mother-in-law in Mexico if he ever had problems with money, he shook his head. "No, I have never had a problem with my mother-in-law. I have heard from other friends that they sometimes have problems like that, like her buying a gold chain with the money instead of spending it on food. But me, no, I have never had that

kind of problem." The only families to admit to any disagreements over money were those whose children lived with other relatives.

Paula described money conflicts with her cousin and his wife, who cared for Cindy and Mateo in the same house where Paula had lived prior to migration. When I first interviewed Paula, she said she sent $250 per month to her uncle for food expenses. She sent money for education and clothes directly to her son Mateo because, "He started complaining that they didn't give him the money I was sending." In fact, migrant parents must weigh their children's accounts and motivations against those of their relatives. It only appeared to be when other relatives are caregivers and children are older–as in Paula's case–that parents' judge their children's accounts to be more reliable.

Migrant parents' often worry that their relatives have become inappropriately dependent on their remittances. In Paula's case, she had helped to finance the 15th birthday party (*quinceñera*) for her cousin's daughter Lola. It was supposedly a loan, but one which had not been re-paid over a year later. Paula felt particularly bad because her own daughter Cindy did not want her own party; Cindy said that there were better things to spend the money on and that she would not want to have an important party without her mother present. In effect, Paula's remittances had paid for the coming-of-age party of the daughter of two well-off professionals, both schoolteachers, and not her own daughter's.

Carla[31] had similar experiences in managing the remittances she sent for her two children when she moved to the United States after a divorce. Although originally from Ecuador, her story illustrates money conflicts similar to those in Mexican families. Originally, Carla's youngest daughter stayed with one of her sisters while her older

[31] Carla is not a member of a family constellation.

daughter lived alone and attended university. However, after three years, Carla returned home because her younger daughter was emotionally distraught because her uncle treated her badly and made increasing financial demands. “He started asking for more and more money, taking advantage of the situation that I was sending money home.” Carla asked her oldest daughter to leave college to care for the younger girl, and both went to live with Carla’s cousins. However, Carla arranged for another sister, living in a nearby town, to administer the money she sent home because “I trust her more [than the cousins].”

No case better illustrates the way money can become a source of conflict for families than that of Eric, Osvaldo, and Edwin, the three brothers whose hardships after their mother migrated were documented in in earlier chapters. A more detailed review of their story reveals that money was central to the problems they encountered.

Eric, 11, Eric, 8, and Osvaldo, 7, had lived with their parents and an older sister in Mexico City until their parents’ marriage ended in a bitter divorce. Their father moved in with a girlfriend and their mother, distraught over the divorce and suddenly having to support four children, migrated to the United States. The three boys stayed with their sister, 15 at the time, in a house occupied by four of their maternal aunts and ailing grandmother. The boys were immediately subject to abuse from their older sister “who once put one of the boys head first in the washing machine” and from their aunts, one of whom “used to force feed Osvaldo *menudo* [cow intestines] even though she knew it made him throw up.” Another aunt living nearby felt sorry for the boys and took them to live at her house. The money problems began at that point. According to cousin Faviola, who related the story, the boys’ mother had arranged to send $300 every two weeks to support the children. Given migrant mothers’ economic difficulties in New Jersey, it is

not surprising that this agreement was difficult to uphold. Faviola explained, “Sometimes she wasn’t able to send the money. Then her brother-in-law would complain. Their mother began to wonder what they were doing with the money she sent, because you don’t need all that much just to feed the boys.” The three boys continued to behave badly, and–to make matters worse– “I think they humiliated my aunt because they would say to her that you eat because of my mom.”

After a few months, the boys’ mother arranged to send remittances to another sister as she began to think that the money she sent was not being used to support her children. The sister who lived nearby would buy food for the boys and take it to them every week. The brother-in-law who had complained about the money got upset. He threatened to call the DIF, the Mexican equivalent to Youth and Family Services, to report the boys as abandoned by their mother.

At this point, cousin Faviola’s family intervened. Faviola often traveled to Mexico City from the small town in Oaxaca where she lived with her parents and witnessed the escalation of the problems. When Faviola’s father also traveled on business and also saw how the situation had deteriorated. The elderly grandmother came crying to him saying that she was too old to stop her daughters from abusing the boys. After a desperate call from the boys’ mother in the United States, Faviola brought the three boys and their sister back with her to Oaxaca. Shortly thereafter, the boys’ older sister ran away back to Mexico City to live with a boyfriend. At the time I visited the family, the boys had not seen either their mother or father in over a year. Since they had moved to Oaxaca, their father in Mexico City had not even inquired after them. In short, Faviola

explained to me, they felt abandoned and showed it by frequently misbehaving,, habits she was working to correct.

The boys' mother continued to send money for their support, now to the family in Oaxaca. Faviola explained, "We didn't make an agreement like they did in Mexico. We did it to help her out. We told her to send what she can and that she shouldn't worry because here her children are going to eat, they won't go hungry."

Faviola's family offered to help out, motivated in part by their religious commitment as Jehovah's Witnesses. However, supporting three additional boys put financial strains on the family budget. When I interviewed the family at the end of February, Faviola told me that the boys' mother had last sent about $550 before the holidays. The money had since run out. Faviola's father drives a truck that transports local residents to the nearest big city, but much of the time his salary goes to repairs on the vehicle. Faviola and her sister earn modest incomes as part-time community educators, but Faviola also has a number of medical expenses related to her chronic illness. Moreover, Faviola has two younger siblings, so the combined family income must support five young children and four adults. When I asked Faviola if caring for the boys is ever a burden, she explained:

> No, it is not a burden. But it does affect us as a family. My other little sister got really jealous when they first arrived. And the littlest one felt bad because I couldn't bring him things like I used to. Before when I got paid, I would always bring him something small. But now I would have to bring five and that is too many. For example, the other day I was in a good mood and I invited the kids to

> an ice-cream. But they all picked the ones on the cones, which are more, like seven pesos (70 cents) each. Then we had some too. In the end, I spent like 50 pesos ($5) only on ice cream.

As mentioned, within a year, the three boys were no longer living in Oaxaca. The crisis support Faviola's family provided could only be temporary due to the precarious nature of her family's economic situation. In this case, like others, the migrant mother resolved the financial conflicts by sending for her children as quickly as she could. However, the instability of the care arrangement, albeit short-lived, came with a price: the three boys were clearly emotionally distraught over the upheaval they experienced after their mother's departure.

Jealousy

When children stayed with grandparents, money did not cause such conflicts. Unlike reports from the Caribbean, where financial support is key to children's experiences in their grandparents' homes (Olwig 1999), none of the grandparents I interviewed complained that migrant parents did not send enough money. They did acknowledge that remittances were insufficient, but they rarely blamed migrant parents for the lack of funds. Indeed, grandparents communicated regularly with migrant parents and they seemed to understand the financial difficulties migrants faced in the United States. One grandmother, for example, said that she did not receive enough money to cover the costs of raising four grandchildren. However, her main complaint was, "My poor daughter is over there suffering for her children and they don't know how to take advantage of her sacrifice."

Instead, conflicts between migrant parents and grandparents arose most often over children's loyalties. A major source of tension was the affection children developed for their grandparents. As I have explained, grandparents recognize biological parents' rights to their children and tend not to flaunt children's attachment to them as compared to their lack of warmth towards their parents. However, migrant parents were both upset over their children's affections for grandparents and felt that they could not complain about it. Migrant parents had to balance allegiance to their own parents and also to their children, which, at times, was difficult.

Nydia's problems managing her relationship with her parents, children and husband, described in Chapter 1, illustrate the point. Recall that Nydia decided to migrate to the United States to reunite with her husband who had been away for a little over a year. She had worked as a teacher prior to migration, traveling to a town nearly three hours from her home every week, and leaving her son Kevin with her parents. When I met Nydia in New Jersey, she was pregnant and had left her job as a waitress. Nydia and her husband, Carlos, who worked in landscaping, had decided that after the birth of their second child, they would return to Mexico to reunite both their children. In our first conversation, Nydia said:

> The only thing that makes me feel badly is when he [Kevin] doesn't want to talk to me. Sometimes there is a little distance between us and he doesn't want to talk. When I was there, he was a little closer to me.

> But now that he knows we are going home, he always asks on the phone when we will be back. You see, he knows that he has a mother and a father in the United States. Well, he knows that he has his father, but there is a little more rejection there. It is more difficult because he only knew him for six months.

But, he doesn't deny his mother, he knows the place I have in his life. He knows he has two sets of parents, but there is a difference. When I was there before I came to the United States sometimes I would correct him and he would listen to me, but sometimes he wouldn't. But if my parents corrected him, he would always listen to them. There is more respect there.

> It feels terrible, but it is because of work. Maybe it was easier for me to leave him because I already didn't see him so much because of my job. (At the remark Nydia's eyes grew teary and she was on the verge of crying until I changed the subject.)

Nydia's mother Doña Ana emphasized how important four-year-old Kevin was to her and her husband when I visited the family in the hot dusty coastal town of Guerrero where they lived. From my field notes:

> Kevin likes to talk to his parents on the phone. However, he doesn't want to go to the United States. Kevin's parents were going to send for him and he didn't want to go. Doña Ana said they felt that he couldn't go, because if the boy left, her

husband would grow ill. Her husband is very close to the child because he has always lived with them and he helped take care of Kevin since he was only 40 days old. Once Nydia took Kevin to visit his other grandparents for a week and Nydia's father was sick with worry the whole time. When his own children were young, he worked in the fields and was away from home almost all day every day. He had very little to do with their care. But, for the past 10 years he stopped planting because the rainy season is so unpredictable and the crops would often dry out. Doña Ana and her husband started raising chickens to sell. He cares for the animals and every day Doña Ana goes to sell them. When Kevin was a baby, Doña Ana would often leave her husband behind with the baby when she went out to sell the chickens. Doña Ana describes the two as very close. Sometimes her daughter Nydia questions her father, wondering why he wasn't as loving with her when she was little. Doña Ana said she has to explain to Nydia that he was simply busy working.

I had visited Doña Ana in mid-October. Nydia, Carlos and their new baby, true to plan, returned home over the holidays. I spoke with Nydia a few times over the phone, learning about the difficulties she had with Carlos after coming home. That March, I visited Nydia again. She explained her separation from Carlos saying that she refused to leave Kevin again, but also felt she could not take the boy away from her parents. Carlos, however, would not stay with her parents and went back to live with his own family. As she explained, "The first time, I left my son for my husband. This time I will stay with

my son." It never, however, crossed Nydia's mind to take Kevin from her parents. Doing so would permanently damage her ties with them.

Nydia's experiences illustrate how children's attachments to their grandparents can create lasting tensions within a family, in this case, actually contributing to the dissolution of the marriage (their separation had multiple cause as Nydia and Carlos had experienced prior conflicts). In this case and others, tensions arising from jealousy never erupted into overt conflict as it did when parents and other relatives disputed the financial equity of the child care arrangement. Rather jealousy was an undercurrent to the relationship. Indeed, neither Nydia or Doña Ana explained their problems in terms of jealousy, although I believe their actions exhibit conflicting claims over four-year-old Kevin's loyalties.

Of Health and Old Age

Grandparents were aware of their declining health as posing a risk to their ability to look after their grandchildren. One grandmother, who described enjoying her grandson's attachment to her, explained, "I am conscious that he is not my son. I recognize this. It would make me happy that he would live with his mother. Because I am old. Maybe right now I am strong, but I will not always be like this. And as the boy grows up, and I grow old, he is going to need his mother." Yet like tensions over children's affection, the declining health of grandparents did not lead to overt conflicts in families.

During interviews, many grandparents spoke of their health as limiting their capacity to care for their grandchildren. One 69-year-old grandmother who lives with her 73-year-old husband told me, "Since we already finished raising our children, yes,

sometimes it is tiring to be doing this again, caring for and educating them." Another grandmother, in her 50s, who cares for four grandchildren and two of her own teenage children, also complained, "Sometimes I feel desperate because there are so many and I already went through mine. But really it is because there are so many of them. Sometimes I don't even have anything to give them to eat." A 68-year-old woman caring for grandsons ages 7 and 11 offered, "Oh yeah, I get tired, how wouldn't I? But what else can I do. I wash their clothes, I grind – yes, I grind my tortillas by hand still . . . sometimes I think I'll be watching grandkids until I am 10 feet under." Interestingly, migrant parents in the United States did not describe the health or exhaustion of grandparents in Mexico as a cause for concern.

The general consensus among grandparents was that they wanted to care for their grandchildren, even though it often became increasingly difficult to do so over time. As one grandmother told me, "Sometimes it is hard with all these kids here but I love them and I want them to stay. I wouldn't change anything because this way there is more love in the house." However, failing health can eventually make it impossible for grandparents to continue looking after their grandchildren. I encountered few cases in which grandparents actually fell ill while caring for grandchildren. Mostly, it appears that migrant parents assessed health issues prior to their departures. For example, one migrant mother said she left her children with their paternal grandparents because they were younger and more physically fit than her own parents, whom she otherwise would have preferred as caregivers.

In two families, however, grandparents' health became a source of difficulty when aging grandmothers became unable to look after their teenage grandsons. In one

case, Nicandra arranged for her mother–also a single mother–to move to the city from a town a few hours away when she decided to migrate. Her siblings complained and criticized her for doing so, however, because they thought their mother was too old to look after the then 10- and 13- year-old boys. Indeed, the older woman had trouble monitoring them. In interviews, both boys described periods of gang involvement after their mother left, although in a city where this is common among youth, they might have done the same had their mother been present. One neighbor told me how the boys often snuck out after their grandmother went to sleep, and explained that she was too old to realize that they were duping her. Eventually, the grandmother passed away, and Nicandra's children remained in the family apartment on their own.

The other grandmother who was too physically feeble to look after her grandson was Nico's grandmother, Doña Elizabeth, described in Chapter 5 as not being able to look after the 13-year-old, who was considered a troublemaker by his teachers and other relatives. Nico had been in his grandmother's care since he was an infant after both his parents and all his older siblings moved to the United States. The first day I met Nico's grandmother she told me that she recently had had a stroke and had not regained full movement in her face. Moreover, in her 70s at the time, she clearly had a hard time moving about the house, making the general disarray, chicken droppings, and dirty clothes piled everywhere understandable.

Despite clear evidence of these grandmothers' failing health, their ability to care for their grandchildren did not create tensions with migrant parents, although the migrants' siblings did complain, as did some of the family's neighbors. Nonetheless, the

risk of being unable to live up to their caregiving responsibilities due to ill health constantly preoccupied the grandmothers I interviewed.

Summary

A review of the tensions in relationships with caregivers reveals distinctly different sources of tension when children live with grandparents as compared to when they live with other relatives. Relationships with other relatives are based mostly on economic exchange; thus tensions develop with time over the involved parties' assessments of whether or not the exchange of remittances for child care is a fair one. Conflicts over the equity of the arrangements are often explicitly disputed and may involve various family members. In contrast, relationships with grandparents are based on intergenerational obligation that extends in multiple directions between migrant parents, grandparents and children. Sources of tensions are neither accentuated nor openly discussed between the parties involved in the arrangements. Grandparents most often express concern over their ability to care for children due to their declining health over time. Migrant parents often felt jealous over their children's loyalties, but were reluctant to say so.

Remarkably given the types of severe behavioral difficulties exhibited by some of the children of migrants that I described in Chapter 5, neither caregivers nor migrant parents described children's behavior as a source of conflict in the child care arrangement. Clearly, children's behavioral difficulties affected the adults in their lives. Yet I did not hear relatives or grandparents complain that the children in their care acted badly because migrant parents had abandoned them. Similarly, migrant parents did not for the most part blame caregivers–whether relatives or grandparents–for the behavioral

problems their children experienced. Outsiders, whether teachers, neighbors, or other family members did make these types of complaints, as will be discussed further in the next chapter. Thus the sources of tension with caregivers, whether financial exchange, grandparents' health or jealousy over children's loyalties, do not undermine the basic logic of family migration strategy to the degree that might occur if complaints were over the adequacy of the care children received.

TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS OF CARE

According to Hansen (2005), when it comes to caring for their children, American families are not as independent as one would expect given the predominant ideology of the nuclear family. Regardless of class background, Hansen finds that contemporary Americans rely on multiple individuals to develop a network of care for their children. Such networks, she suggests, are social creations (as opposed to purely biological or economic exchanges) that involve a process of "staging networks" which includes identifying potential caregivers, linking members through reciprocal relationships, and mobilizing obligation. "Network members evaluate situations and assess each other's commitments, 'needs', intentions, reliability, and capacities in light of their own. Through this process of perception, valuation, and interpretation, they negotiate reciprocity" (Hansen 2005:157).

In this chapter I have described migrant parents' networks of care when they leave their children behind to come to the United States and have shown these networks, in contrast to those described by Hansen, to be surprisingly limited given the emphasis on

extended family ties in Mexico. In the transnational context, parents identify a limited set of caregivers, choosing maternal grandparents, paternal grandparents, and occasionally other relatives in that order of preference. While men figure into decisions regarding the child care arrangements and often grandfathers take an active interest in caring for grandchildren, parents always identify female caregivers for their children (see also Chamberlain 2003; Salazar-Parreñas 2005; Schmalzbauer 2005a; Soto 1987). In effect if American families' reliance on multiple caregivers for their children suggests that American families are "not-so-nuclear" in nature, Mexican transnational families' reliance on so few caregivers suggests that Mexican families are more nuclear than the ideology of familism and its dense reliance on extended kinship ties suggests, at least when it comes to the care of children in the transnational context.

Of Obligation and Reciprocity

Once migrant parents have identified caregivers for their children, the obligation underlying the child care arrangement, and the resulting reciprocal relationships–or norms of exchange–that they entail, differ depending on whether grandparents or other relatives remain with children in Mexico.

As summarized in Table 6, other relatives are motivated to care for children out of feelings of obligation to migrant parents. Like among families Goody (1982) studied in West Africa, the child fostering arrangement has less to do with children than with an agreement between the parents and what she calls the "pro-parents" or, in this case, the other relative caregivers. Since they offer to take care of children (often reluctantly) in exchange for migrant parents' covering the costs of children's care, the remittances migrant parents send are the key aspect of the arrangement. Given the emphasis on the

exchange between parents and relative caregivers, both parties often scrutinize this explicitly defined exchange according to norms of equity. Conflicts over the equity of the arrangement may erupt. In short, since other relatives are mobilized as caregivers out of obligations to parents and monetary exchange forms the basis of the reciprocity among those with limited financial resources, the child care arrangements with relatives are overtly exchange-based.

TABLE 6: Reciprocity and Obligation in Relationships with Caregivers in Mexican Transnational Families

	GRANDPARENTS	**OTHER RELATIVES**
ON LEAVING	Grandparents encourage migrant parents to leave their grandchildren in their care.	Relatives are reluctant to take on the responsibility of children.
MAIN ACTORS	Arrangements involve intergenerational obligations in multiple directions between grandparents, parents and children.	Arrangements are primarily between adults: namely migrant parents and other parents
ECONOMICS	Grandparents depend on migrants' remittances but don't feel they can stake claim to remittances unless in the name of children.	Economic exchange of remittance for child care expenses is at the heart of the relationship.

EMOTIONS	Grandparents are emotionally tied to grandchildren but do not believe their bonds to children negate parental rights to children.	Relatives try to avoid emotional bonds to children (usually unsuccessfully).
INFLUENCE	Grandparents can wield influence on migrant parents' decisions.	Relatives feel powerless to influence migrant parents.
CONFLICT	Conflicts are covert and related to grandparents' declining health and children's bonds to grandparents.	Conflicts are overt and related to the use of remittances.

In contrast, when grandparents are caregivers, the lines of obligation that motivate the arrangement are more complex. Grandparents feel obligated both to migrant parents, who are their own children, but also as grandparents to their grandchildren. Migrant parents feel they are able to fulfill economic obligations to their parents and to their children simultaneously. Children also may be able to fulfill certain obligations to their grandparents by providing them with companionship during old age. The expectations of exchange embedded in these kin obligations are also complicated (see Gouldner 1960; Hansen 2005). Unlike the overt economic exchange with relatives, money matters are more implicit since emotional bonds are expected to trump financial ones. Emotional bonds may substitute for economic exchange, especially during the periods of financial instability that are common during parents' migration, particularly for single mothers. A

frequent interchange between the economic and emotional logic of reciprocity that relationships with grandparents entail means these arrangements are often more durable in the transnational context. The tensions that afflict these arrangements, whether over children's loyalties or grandparents' declining physical ability to care for their grandchildren over time are rarely discussed openly. Instead, these tensions are the emotional undercurrents of the child care arrangement.

Middlewomen

Mexican caregivers, either other relatives or grandparents, have two options in the roles they assume with the children in their care. They can become "substitute" parents of sorts, assuming parenting duties of nurturance, training and sponsorship (Goody 1982). Or, they can act as middlewomen by temporarily taking over only what Goody (1982) calls the "tasks of nurturance" while parents are away. Given the differences in reciprocity and obligation when grandparents care for children as compared to relatives, it is interesting that both grandparents and other relatives invariably adopt roles as middlewomen. Neither attempt to displace biological parents' rights to their children. Rather caregivers remain as intermediaries in these relationships. As such, extended family ties in Mexican families ultimately support and reinforce parent-child obligations during migration.

Other relatives, who are extremely reluctant to take on the responsibility of looking after someone else's children, may decide to care for children out of pity towards parents or in order to gain some access to remittances. Yet when they do, relatives downplay the emotional attachments they feel towards the children in their care. While they often do become attached to these children, they are constantly reminded that they

have no rights over migrants' children, as they feel powerless in shaping migrant parents' future decisions regarding the care of the children (see Table 6). Moreover, given the economic expectations in the caregiving arrangement, it is not in relatives' interests to alienate migrant parents on emotional grounds. Doing so would jeopardize access to the remittances, which they need in order to care for children.

Since a general air of mistrust between relatives and migrant parents predominates, migrant parents to often strive towards reunification with their children living with other relatives as quickly as possible. So, for example, by the summer of 2005, Eric, Osvaldo and Edwin were all reunited with their mother in the United States, ending a rather difficult year and a half of hardship after she migrated. Likewise, the mother who left her children with a sister (to migrate after getting divorced) also sent for her children in the summer of 2005. Neither of Paula's children continues to live with her uncle; both chose to be independent once they came of age with Mateo joining Paula in the United States and Cindy moving in with her boyfriend. In the end, when relatives care for migrant parents children, child care arrangements tend to be highly fragile and often in flux, spurring migrant parents to keep the period of separation from children as short in duration as possible.

Grandparents are more willing caregivers for children, and generally favored by all parties in Mexican transnational families, understandably given the instability children experience when under the care of other relatives. Even so, grandparents remain as intermediary caregivers and prefer to relate to the children in their care as grandparents, rather than parents. Grandparents are reluctant to physically discipline their grandchildren and are indulgent towards them, which may cause disciplinary conflicts during early

adolescence when children of migrant parents seek more personal freedom in their lives. Particularly given the constraints of aging, grandparents prefer to enjoy the affection of their grandchildren without carrying the full weight of responsibility for their development.

Moreover, grandparents also feel obligated to their own children: migrant parents. Grandparents almost never pressure migrant parents for funds, even though they often feel they lack sufficient economic resources and statistics indicate that elderly in Mexico are badly in need of financial support from their children. To their grandchildren they often praise parents' sacrifice. They constantly highlight their grandchildren's need for biological parents, and acknowledge biological parents' rights to their children. When they intervene in parents' decisions regarding children, they do so as grandparents, who feel they have grounds to advocate on behalf of grandchildren out of their emotional bonds to them. Grandparents do not want to undermine migrant parents' efforts; they are, after all, their own children and grandparents hope to support their endeavors to care for their family albeit from a distance. Thus, despite younger children's practices of calling grandmothers, "mama", rarely do these women consider themselves their grandchildren's mothers. Instead, they–like other relatives–position themselves as middlewomen in the transnational caregiving relationship.

In summary, by acting as middlewomen, both grandparents and other relative caregivers bolster an ideological model of the Mexican family in which the parent-child bond is paramount even when international borders separate parents and children. They may do so for different reasons. Grandparents may be motivated out of their desire to support both their children and their grandchildren. They may want to enjoy being

grandparents and not want to relive the pressures and responsibilities of parenthood. Other relatives may act as middlewomen because they simply do not have the economic resources to take care of migrant parents' children without the support of parents' remittances. Or perhaps relatives are reluctant to supplant parents because the moral burden of motherhood is so strong for Mexican families. If something were to go wrong with a child in her care, this "pro-parent" would be blamed for the failing. In addition, since the relationship between mother and child is so key to the definition of the family, relatives may recognize that they cannot unseat mothers' rights to their children and as a consequence will have a very difficult time raising children whose allegiance falls elsewhere.

In either case, caregivers' roles in Mexican transnational families facilitate parent-child separation. They enable parents to leave their children, and do not try to replace them. As intermediaries, caregivers suggest that the ultimate reunification of parents and children is not only a possibility but also a probability.

Yet as middlewomen, both grandparents and relatives support the centrality of children and the gendered expectations central to Mexican families in the transnational context. As a consequence, they often draw attention to the expectations of parents and children that are so difficult for families to meet during periods of separation. Thus, when parents and children are separated due to international migration and caregivers in Mexico do not displace parental rights of training, obligation and sponsorship, the Mexican family model of mother, father, child is reinforced. Ultimately, these middlewomen's roles in the family may actually accentuate the failures of migrant parents to provide for children and of children to live up to their parents' sacrifice.

Chapter 9

CINDY RODRIGUEZ: IN LIMBO

When caregivers act as middlewomen and parents are thousands of miles away, where do children left behind fit? To which family do they belong? Where do their allegiances lie? Cindy's experiences suggest that some children feel that they do not truly fit anywhere. Cindy and migrant mother Paula's experiences show that children left behind may remain in limbo until they come of age and start their own families.

SURMOUNTING POVERTY

Paula grew teary when I first asked if I could interview her about her two children in Mexico. Still, she agreed to the interview, which we scheduled for a Tuesday morning. Since Paula worked two full time jobs at two different fast-food restaurants, that was her only day off from the 70-hour per week work schedule. Walking by a dark blue sheet that had converted the living room into an extra bedroom, we sat in the meticulously clean kitchen in the first floor two-bedroom apartment of a house by the train tracks in an upscale New Jersey town. At the kitchen table, Paula recounted her story.

Paula, a heavy set woman with kind eyes, came to New Jersey about five years ago with the help of her sister; she has two children, a boy, 18, and a girl, 15, who she supports in Mexico. She is one of six siblings, all of whom are in the United States. She currently lives with her boyfriend and sister in New Jersey; one of her brothers lives in Queens and three brothers live in Texas. The family is originally from outside of a small

city in the state of Puebla. Paula studied the six years of *primaria*, or grammar school, and after that she didn't work–she was an *ama de casa*, or a housewife.

Suddenly, Paula started to cry, not profusely, but by closing her eyes and squinting. She said she felt ashamed about her past. After taking a moment, Paula explained that she had met the father of her children when she was about 18. When her daughter was only eight months old, he left her. She felt embarrassed because he left for no reason. One day he went away and didn't tell her why. As far as she knows to this day he has not remarried and lives with his parents. However, he is not in contact with her and her children do not know their father.

Over a year later I learned more details of these early years from Paula's relatives in Mexico. Paula had been living with her mother in a small town when she got pregnant by a neighborhood boyfriend. Paula's mother was furious about the pregnancy. A cousin, Pedro, offered Paula refuge at his house in the nearby city. Since Pedro and his wife Blanca worked as school teachers, Paula stayed at their home throughout her pregnancy in exchange for housekeeping duties. When the couple had a daughter a year later, Paula helped with child care as well. Then she got pregnant again and continued to live with her cousin's family. Paula told me that by this time she could not go back home to her mother, who was struggling alone since Paula's own father had died while she was just a child.

About a year after Paula's daughter was born, she met four women through her cousin who were planning to migrate. She decided to try her luck, like her brothers had before her, in el norte. "Why didn't you go to your brothers already living in Texas for help?" I asked Paula. "Well, you see, my pride has never folded. Ever."

Paula went to the state of Washington in 1989, leaving her four-year-old son Mateo and her one-year-old daughter Cindy with cousin Pedro and his wife Blanca. There she lived with the relatives of one of her travel companions and got a job at McDonalds. As she worked both the opening and closing shifts, Paula was home during the middle of the day and cooked for the family she lived with in exchange for her share of the grocery bill. By cutting daily living costs to a minimum, Paula was able to send $150-$200 a week home for the care of her kids. Paula explained this was necessary because Blanca had to hire help to care for the children in her absence.

When I interviewed Blanca in Mexico, she described the turmoil surrounding Paula's first departure. Although Paula had discussed the possibility of migrating with Blanca and Pedro, she, like most migrants from Mexico who cross the border without proper documentation, did not know the specific departure date. When the time for departure came, Blanca and her husband were away on vacation with their daughter and Paula's oldest son Mateo. "When we came back, she was gone. She left the baby [Cindy] with a neighbor until we got back . . . Paula was only away for a year, but this was a difficult time for me because we were left with three small children," explained Blanca. "The older boy was in kindergarten, and we took the younger two kids to a day care center before we went to work. Fortunately, by that time the kids were not using diapers, but it was still very hard since they were all young."

After just 18 months in the United States, Paula went home. "I couldn't stand it," she said. "I missed my children way too much. During the time I was away, my daughter forgot about me. But when my son would get on the phone he would ask, 'Mama when are you coming?' and 'Mama why did you leave me?'" The adjustment upon Paula's

return wasn't smooth: both Paula and Blanca recalled that when Paula first came home, Cindy didn't recognize her mother. Blanca explained, "She said to me, who is that woman who is going to live downstairs?" Little Cindy eventually learned to follow her older brother's lead, and began recognizing Paula as her mother again after seven or eight months.

Back with the family in Puebla, Paula moved into a bedroom adjoining the kitchen and, as before, took care of the cooking, cleaning, and child care while Blanca and Pedro were at work. Her responsibilities expanded over the next 10 years that she stayed in Mexico. Blanca and Pedro had another daughter who Paula helped to raise. They also set up a store selling fruits and vegetables in the front of their house, which Paula tended to during the day. Paula explained with a note of pride in her voice that when she left the second time, "they closed the store because there was no one around to tend to it."

For over two years, Paula planned her second undocumented trip north before eventually migrating again in 1999. Paula patiently waited until her son, Mateo, graduated from the ninth grade; this time she had decided to take him with her. Blanca said Paula was insistent on taking Mateo with her, even against her advice. "I said it was going to be more difficult there with him and that what was he going to do while she worked. But she insisted on taking him. 'He, I am taking with me' Paula said. And she did." Paula admitted that Mateo wasn't crazy about leaving their home in Mexico. Moreover, "My daughter often asked why [I was going to leave], but I explained to her that there was no future for me in Mexico. There I wasn't able to save any money." Paula didn't want to take the younger Cindy along for two reasons. First, the expense of

crossing for three people, rather than two, was too much. Second, Paula worried about the danger a young girl faced in crossing the border. “Cindy eventually accepted that I leave, but only with the condition that I go back for her after a few months.”

According to Blanca, the second departure was much easier for the family in Mexico. “I was prepared. I put my younger daughter into a day care center a whole year before she left. Paula, since she had always cared for her, said, ‘Oh, Blanca, don’t take her there. Why since I am here.’ But this time I wanted to be prepared since I knew she would be leaving.” The housework was also easier for Blanca to assume once the children were older. “I am the kind of person that always did everything with her [Paula], together. We washed the clothes together, we cooked together, we washed dishes together. So that when she left, it was not so hard for me to keep doing everything.”

This time, Paula moved to New Jersey with the help of her sister. Within just a day, she started working at a local fast food restaurant. Mateo was left alone. Paula planned that he would attend high school during the day and even spoke to her manager about a part time position in the evenings. But they arrived in New Jersey in July, giving Mateo almost two months with little to do. Quickly he decided he didn’t like the United States or where he lived with his mother in New Jersey. According to Mateo, it was really hard to be away from his family home. “It really isn’t the same to be with your mother than it is to be living with everyone in the family . . . it was really hard for me to get used to the way of life [in the United States].” That fall Mateo never signed up for high school. Instead, he turned to an uncle in Texas who offered to take him in and cover all the costs associated with a high school education. “The opportunity arose for me to study in

Houston, and that was how I saw it, as a great opportunity that I should take." Mateo left for Texas that January.

Mateo completed two years of high school in 18 months by going to summer school. However, he still didn't like living in the United States "so much that he would call me crying," explained Paula. Mateo decided it would be best to return to Mexico to study. Before leaving for Mexico, Mateo moved back with his mother in New Jersey. He worked as a cashier at a fast food restaurant for four months at six dollars an hour. Paula said she felt badly when her son left for Texas, "Mostly because of his rejection after I brought him here. But when he left for Mexico, it hurt more because I knew the separation would be more permanent."

Paula said daughter Cindy felt jealous about being left behind. "I didn't really realize this until once when we were talking on the phone Cindy blurted out, 'Mom, you don't love me because you took Mateo and not me.' " Paula explained that it is much more dangerous for a girl on the border, and that life in the United States was really no good. "Eventually she understood that it wasn't that I don't love her, but that I had her best interests in mind."

In 2004, at the time of my initial interview with Paula, Mateo had been back in Mexico for nearly two years and it had been five years since Paula had seen her daughter Cindy. Mateo, now fluent in English, wanted to get a college degree in tourism. According to Paula, he still needed two more years of high school in Mexico and four years of college to this end. Paula calculated six more years of schooling for her daughter Cindy as well, who wanted to be a schoolteacher and had just started studying at a private high school, financed by her mother's remittances. Working two full time jobs at the two

fast food restaurants in New Jersey, Paula believed she could finance both her children's education. She expected to continue with her grueling schedule for the six years necessary to provide her children with professional degrees that could give them the independence that she never had at their age. If all went according to plan, Paula hoped to eventually return to Mexico for an early retirement.

LEFT BEHIND

I met Cindy and Mateo over six months after first interviewing Paula in New Jersey. By a stroke of luck, the day I visited, Mateo, who was living and attending school in the capital, was home for a weekend visit. The family lived just four blocks up the hill from the center of the city (a sign of status in small cities in Mexico) in a house perched on the side of the hill. The street level entrance was through the storefront–a turquoise painted and tiled room filled with vegetables and fruit. Through the store was the living room. Out the back, stairs winded down to a spacious backyard patio and the kitchen, and a balcony walkway led to a large covered garage and the stairs to the second floor.

At the time, Cindy and Mateo lived with Blanca and Pedro and their children, 17-year old Lola and 8-year-old Jessy. During this first visit I quickly picked up on the language of the family relationships: Mateo, Cindy, Lola and Jessy were all siblings; Blanca and Paula were the two mothers and Pedro the father. Excerpts from my interview with Cindy that first day reveal her emotions at having been left behind.

On Paula's migration: "She told us that she had to leave because, above all else, she had to support us and, also, so that when she comes back she can return to her own house and not to the house of another . . . At first I agreed that she go because we were all

going to go together. She asked me if I wanted to go and at first I told her no because I was afraid. Later I told her yes, but then, well, it was too late . . .”

On conversations with her mother: “She asks if we are okay and, well, about money we don’t do that so much because at school we sell tickets to get money for school supplies. And, she asks if we’ve been to see my grandmother. She asks me how we are here and if we eat well. I tell her yes, that we are eating well. And then when we have vacations she asks if they take us with them and how they treat us. I say that yes, because they always take me along . . . and they treat me well . . . Well, yes I feel bad when she doesn’t call because I don’t know where she lives or who she lives with and I worry that she is going to get sick there and we aren’t going to know about it.”

On the differences of living without her mother: “Before when we would come back from school, well, she was here and then after she left, there was no one here . . . Before I slept with her in the same room, now I am alone . . . You see with them [Blanca and Pedro] I cannot talk about personal things, and, I don’t know. I just don’t like to talk to them. I don’t trust them really . . . It is hard to trust my mother over the phone, you can do it but it isn’t the same. If she was here, it would feel different . . . My mother told me that she wanted to do a big party for my 15th birthday, but I told her that I didn’t want a party because I didn’t want to celebrate that big day without her here . . . It feels really bad because I see my classmates and some of my friends with their mothers and, I don’t know, they go out, they talk, and I feel bad, I guess, because I cannot talk to my mother. That is why I don’t like to go out much. When I see my friends I feel jealous . . . When I have children, I wouldn’t want to leave them because it feels really bad and I wouldn’t want them to suffer . . . For me, the money is not really important.”

Cindy was clear during our interview: she wanted her mother to come home. Cindy explained how she is different from her brother, "I don't think it really matters to him that she is over there–I think it is all the same to him. And, well, not for me. For me it is very exceptional–it is something really painful for me that my mother isn't here with me. He takes it much more lightly."

According to Mateo, his mother's stint in the United States is more like an investment. Mateo said he did not regret his time in the United States, and that he was eager to take advantage of his mother's work so that he could study. "The truth is it is something impossible for me to have her [mother] here. Because then I would have to work–I would have to leave school . . . at least I want to finish my career and then I can say you know what, come back here. Now it is my turn . . . If I have children someday and I have to leave them, I would do it. I think any father would do that for their children. It is not so much a sacrifice, but I see it as an investment. I know that today it is for them and maybe one day when I am old, they will do the same for me."

OUT OF PLACE

The second time I visited Paula's family in Mexico, I was in for a surprise. On the sofa lay an older woman decked in the traditional garb of a region of Oaxaca called the Isthmo, where Blanca's family is from originally. Across from her, and virtually everywhere in the room, were stacks and stacks of plastic baskets and buckets filled with fruit and candy. That evening, Blanca and her husband would be hosting an acostadita, a religiously based party. After being invited to the mid-day meal of goat meat with hot green salsa and corn tortillas, I whiled away the afternoon feeling slightly out of place in

the festive atmosphere. Marginal to the flurry of activity around the house, mostly I sat with Blanca's mother watching TV. Hours later, after taking invitations for the party to some neighbors, Cindy joined me on the sofa. Now relaxed in a lull from the excitement, she asked if I was going to Mass. I hadn't known we were to go to church and wasn't sure how to answer until she announced that she wasn't going. I stayed with Cindy.

Once the rest of the family left, Cindy shared the latest news on her brother Mateo. Just a week before, Paula had called to say she couldn't send money and instructed Cindy to withdraw money from their savings account. When she did, Cindy found the account balance to be only about a third of what it had been just months before. Apparently Mateo had borrowed the money and not repaid it. Cindy suspected the unauthorized loans started in October because she heard through the grapevine that Mateo liked to drink with his friends. "I think he used up the money buying liquor and was spending it on stupid stuff with his friends."

"Your mom must be mad," I said.

"Yeah, but I tell her it is her fault," answered Cindy. "All the time she is always giving him everything that he wants and look how he repays her."

"And your dad and mom here?" I asked.

"My dad is furious. He is going to change all the locks."

Cindy seemed to get satisfaction in describing every last lock in the house that her father was going to change so that Mateo would not be able to figure out how to get in. "He also says he is going to go to the apartment and take away Mateo's computer and stereo to sell them to get the money back."

I never heard anything more about Mateo's alleged misuse of his mother's savings, so I don't know whether Cindy's accusations were true. True or not, they reflect Cindy's feelings that her mother had always favored her older brother.

> I feel upset sometimes at my mother for not calling more often. When she doesn't call anymore, I feel like she has abandoned me. When she does call, the first thing she always asks about is my brother. She doesn't even ask about what I am doing just, "how is your brother." So after this [alleged stealing of money] I told her. I said, "Mom, you don't even call or care about me, just your son, and look what he does to you."

Cindy acknowledged that her mother has been responsive and is now calling more often. In fact, that evening before bed, Paula called and spoke with Cindy for half an hour.

The next morning, after a late night of food and other festivities, I was able to fully take in the surroundings of the second floor bedroom where I had been sent to sleep. There was no door to the room, just an arch of bricks opening into another bedroom with bunk beds where the youngest daughter Jessy slept with her cousins the night before. The walls were painted peach, and new tile shined on the floor. Beneath the clothes and toys that lay strewn about from the visitors, the rooms were quite beautiful. Downstairs I found 17-year-old Lola watching TV and I asked about the house. She told me the addition was built two years ago. There are four bedrooms upstairs as well as a bathroom, and they also added the covered driveway where the party was held the prior evening. I was curious about who sleeps where. "Well, my parents sleep in the master bedroom, and

I have the front room. My sister Jessy sleeps where the bunk beds are and when Mateo was here, he used to sleep in the bed where you stayed last night."

"What about Cindy?" I asked Lola.

"Oh, her room is downstairs, by the kitchen. She didn't want to move upstairs with us."

As we talked, I looked around at the family photographs decorating the living room walls. There were a handful of portraits of Lola from her 15th birthday. I saw baby pictures of Jessy and a number of shots of Blanca and her family dressed in the traditional garb of the Isthmo region of Oaxaca. There were also some wedding photos. Notably, there were no pictures of Mateo. There were no portraits of Paula. And there were no images of Cindy displayed on the walls.

Later I returned upstairs to peek into all of the new rooms. Each had the same fancy tile and brightly painted peach walls. Lola's bedroom was decorated with a set of new white furniture, which matched the cheery room decor. After breakfast, upon asking for Cindy and learning that she was in her bedroom, I had the excuse to check out her sleeping quarters. The only exit to the ample room was a curtained doorway into the kitchen. Blue and white tiles and turquoise blue walls matched the décor of the living room and store above. However, the bright blue paint had peeled off in a number of places, and Cindy had attempted to cover the spots with posters of school projects. Despite being a comfortable space compared to many I had seen in other Mexican homes, Cindy's room was markedly dreary compared to the rest of the family's living quarters. Although the night before I had seen examples of an extroverted Cindy entertaining guests during the party, I was struck by what seemed to be a Cinderella phenomenon,

albeit of Cindy's own choosing. While her mother was away, Cindy preferred to live apart from the others in the dark windowless first floor room by the kitchen: the servant quarters. She appeared to feel that she was different from the others in her family.

THROUGH THE EYES OF OTHERS

On my next visit to Blanca and Pedro's house, accounts from both Blanca and sister Lola further confirmed the costs of Paula's migration for Cindy.

Blanca, like Paula, Cindy and Mateo, articulated the overall family narrative as one of a united front after we spent the day at a *quinceñera*[32] and visiting family together. "We have never treated them [Cindy and Mateo] differently. As you saw today, if we go to a party, we all go like one family. And it has always been this way. We all go together." But Blanca also admitted that she notes some differences between the girls. She described Cindy as the most aggressive of the three sisters.

> Sometimes Cindy hits little Jessy a lot and my other daughter, the older one [Lola] gets upset and defends her little sister. She tells [Cindy] not to hit her. I think it is because they aren't from the same blood, and that is why she hits her. In contrast, since the other two are sisters, they defend each other.

I had noticed throughout the day that Cindy seemed more affectionate with her father Pedro than with Blanca, and I asked Blanca if this is so. Blanca smiled, "I think so. It is because since she was little he was the only father figure that she had. He is the only father that she knows." Blanca implied that since Cindy has a mother, her role is not as

[32] The traditional coming out party for young women in Mexico when they turn fifteen.

important. In line with Blanca's biological logic I asked if she thinks it matters that he is the blood relative. Blanca nodded in agreement, "Well yes, it is also because of the blood."

Blanca initially claimed that Cindy's aggressive behavior is a personality trait, but later added that she thinks Paula's departure has affected Cindy more than Mateo, "because she is so aggressive and sometimes she seems really sad." Blanca also explained that Cindy has seemed to be affected in school. "Well last year she failed [left back a year] and I said, Cindy, you have to study and make an effort at school because your mom isn't there suffering and working so that you do nothing here. She is sacrificing herself there so that you have a better life here. You have to take advantage of her sacrifice."

"Do you think Cindy wants to go live with her mom in the US?" I asked.

Blanca paused and answered, "I would say no. One time I had problems with her because she was going out a lot. She isn't like Lola who always comes back when she says she will. [Cindy] would go out and she wouldn't come back. So then I said, 'What are we going to do?' I told her if she keeps it up, I would call her mother and tell her to take her over there."

I asked, "And she stopped?"

"Yes, she stopped. That is why I say I don't think she wants to go there."

I got a similar version of a rebellious Cindy from 17-year-old Lola. Lola told me that during the upcoming holiday (holy week), neither she nor Cindy was going to go on vacation with their parents to Oaxaca. On the last visit Cindy spent so much time out late

with her boyfriend that her parents got angry and prohibited the holiday trip for both girls. “It isn’t the first time that I got burned for putting my hands in the fire for her.”

Lola complained that last summer Cindy wanted to go to the pool to be with her boyfriend. It was complicated because neither knows how to swim. But Lola went to bat for Cindy and convinced their mom to let her go. Then Cindy didn’t come home until after seven that evening. Now Lola was upset because Cindy was arranging for her boyfriend to come visit over the holidays while their parents were away. “And the worst is that she is insisting that he come and stay at the house. If she wants to do this, she could at least be proper. He can stay at a hotel and they can visit during the day.”

Lola explained that this is how she did it once. She smiled deviously, adding that Cindy is not the only one with a boyfriend in Oaxaca. Lola is also seeing a young man studying at the university. Once, she said, he came to visit her in a nearby city where her cousins live. He stayed at the hotel, she stayed at her cousins’ house, and they visited during the day. “But Cindy is so stubborn, she wants to do everything her own way.”

I asked Lola, “Has Cindy always been this way or has she changed since her mother left?”

“She has always been aggressive. When we were little, she would hit me a lot. And now in school, she also fights with the other kids.”

“You mean physically?” I asked.

“Once, yes. I remember they told me that my sister was fighting and I went to see, but I don’t like to get involved in those kinds of things. I saw her all in a ball with another girl. The other girl was crying. But Cindy, she just got up and (acts out Cindy combing bangs behind her ears and with a defiant smile), like it was nothing.”

"Was there a change after her mother left?" I asked again.

"When her mother left, well, we all cried. Me too, because she was the one to watch us since we were little. We missed her a lot. And I think that yes, although [Cindy] has always been aggressive, it has been more so since her mother left."

CHANGE OF PLANS

After returning to New Jersey, I learned from Paula that drastic changes in the family's relationships had occurred over a period of just a few months. First, Paula told me that her son Mateo had dropped out of school. Apparently, Paula had continued to send money to Mateo for school until she learned that he had not been studying for over two months. Furious, "I cut him off." It wasn't long after Paula stopped sending money that Mateo called and asked to come to the United States to join Paula. He didn't want to study anymore. He wanted to work. Paula agreed to send for him and was only waiting for her boyfriend to return from his trip to Mexico to help make the arrangements for the crossing. Mateo arrived that July and began working as a cashier at the local supermarket.

Cindy's life had also changed drastically since I had seen her in Mexico. In a rather remarkable show of independence, Cindy decided that she wanted to move away from home to the capital city to finish her studies, as Mateo had previously done. She found a family she knew from vacations in Oaxaca to support her and offer her a room to rent with them in the city.

"I didn't want to let her go," explained Paula. "I told her it would be better for me to send for her to come here if she isn't going to put effort into her studies. But then the man [father of family where Cindy is living] told me that he went to get her and picked

up her grades at the end of the school year and she had done very well last year. He told me she is very motivated to keep studying and so I guess we will see what happens this year."

"Do you think Cindy misses her family at home?" I asked Paula.

"What is she going to miss?" Paula retorted, "Now she doesn't have to sweep and clean and everything. She is much happier now."

In October I attended a small party for Mateo's twentieth birthday. I arrived while food preparations were still in progress and had the opportunity to visit with Paula before her attentions were diverted to the other guests. When I briefly asked after her daughter Cindy, Paula looked distressed. "Is she still studying in the city?" I asked. Paula shrugged her shoulders, and answered in a hushed voice, "She went off with her boyfriend."

Not long after, when the others went out for soda, Paula told me that sometime in September Cindy–again acting as an independent decision-maker–had left the city to move in with her boyfriend and his family in Oaxaca. "I was really really angry for a while. I wanted her to have a career so much! And now she just left with her boyfriend. But, since it was about a month ago, I have since calmed down."

"Do you talk to her?" I asked.

"Oh yes," she answered. "I would never abandon my daughter. I talk to her every day I have off. I don't want her to feel like she is alone. She is just so young to have gone off with her boyfriend. You know, she isn't even 17 for another few months! I don't want her to feel like if something goes wrong, she has to stay there. She just has to say the word and I will bring her here with me."

Paula said she speaks often with Cindy's boyfriend's mother, since she wants to make sure that Cindy is treated well. "I don't want her to treat my daughter badly. I tell her that Cindy isn't used to doing housework. I tell her she doesn't know how to cook, nor wash the clothes. I have asked her to be patient with my daughter. Cindy's boyfriend's mother tells me not to worry, that she is teaching her how to cook and all. But . . . you see? That is why I wanted her to have a profession . . . so she wouldn't have to cook and clean for the rest of her life."

For the time being, it appeared that Cindy might continue her studies. At 18, her boyfriend was not yet out of school. He had one more year before getting a degree in teaching. "He says that his uncle has a teacher's contract there in town and is planning on retiring next year, so he will get the contract there in town. But who knows. That is what he says. I don't know the family . . . I tell Cindy that I want her to have a career, to finish school. Her boyfriend tells me not to worry, and that they will try to get her a place to study there in town at the school for teachers." In the meantime, aside from learning domestic duties, 16-year-old Cindy plans to open a beauty salon in a house her boyfriend inherited from his grandparents that sits in the center of town.

Paula said she had misgivings about her daughter's emotional state. "You know? She told me all these things about her brother Mateo, that he was a drunk, that he was doing drugs. And you know how terrible that feels? When Mateo came I had a doubt in my heart whether or not my son could really have done all these terrible things that she said. But you see him here? There he is, playing at his computer."

She pointed towards Mateo who was in sight but in another room sitting at the computer watching a movie. "That is all he does. He works here at the supermarket and

he also has a part time job with me at the Burger King. Then, in the afternoons, he comes back and is at home, like this, playing with his computer. My sister and others say, 'Listen, Paula, if Mateo was into drugs and other things like that, do you really think he could be so calm for all these four months that he has been here? Don't you think', they say, 'that if he was into those things he would be bored, nervous, and anxious all the time?' "

As for Cindy, Paula said she feels that all she can do now is support her daughter. "For me, right now, the most important thing is to be in communication with her. I don't want her to feel that she is alone in this. I am her mother, and no matter what happens, I have to support her. But you know, I wanted her to have a professional career so much."

Paula had been stirring the chicken she was boiling on the stove. Now she came to sit at the table next to me. "And you know what hurts the most?" she added. "I feel like I have been a bad mother. I feel guilty–I think to myself, maybe if I had been there when she needed me, watching her, all of this would not have happened."

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

In many ways, Paula beat the odds stacked against her as a single teenage mother in rural Mexico. Paula went from being a house servant for her cousin to being able to pay for a private education for her two children. Staying in Mexico she never would have been able to provide her children with the opportunities they received. Nor would she have achieved the level of independence and self-worth that I believe migration provided her as an individual. Moreover, after her first trip to Oregon, Paula took painstaking efforts to plan her migration in such a way to lessen the impact of her absence on her

children. She waited through what she deemed to be important years, before migrating a second time. She believed the best course of action would be to take her older son with her so she could provide him with opportunities in the United States. Afraid of the border crossing for her daughter, Paula left Cindy with the same people and in the same house she had lived all her life.

Despite Paula's careful planning and the opportunities her migration gave her children, her absence had unintended consequences. Cindy, like other teenagers described in Chapter 5, had difficulties in school while her mother was away, being left back once. Cindy--according to her family members--was also aggressive and had some behavioral problems. She did not live up to her mother's expectations of academic achievement (at least not on the time line her mother had proposed) and instead dropped out of school and went to live with her boyfriend at the age of 16. For Cindy, Paula's migration was not a success story.

This chapter suggests that one of the reasons that Cindy experienced difficulties while her mother was away was due to the feelings of dislocation that resulted from living in someone else's home without a mother to give her a sense of having her own family. Cindy did not feel the same as her other sisters Lola and Jessy, despite her parents in Mexico's efforts to treat all the children equally. Her pictures were not on the living room wall. She chose to live in the basement room by the kitchen. Cindy might have felt differently living with a grandparent, as many other children did. Yet grandparent caregivers, as described in the previous chapter, have other problems--particularly that of old age--that may make children feel disconnected from them in a similar way. Grandparents are family, but they are nonetheless family once removed. Children are

clearly aware that their grandparents relate to them in different ways than their parents would.

Cindy also felt left out of her mother's life. Unlike Mateo, she had not migrated and glimpsed the world in which her mother operated. She was constantly aware of her mother's absence, and felt jealous of friends who had mothers to take them shopping. Cindy felt in limbo between her attachments to her life in Mexico (she did not want to migrate to the United States) and to her attachments to her mother. Despite all of Paula's efforts, in the end, Cindy did not feel fully a part of either her family in Mexico or the family her mother represented. It is perhaps no wonder that she decided to form her own family instead.

Chapter 10

NEIGHBORS

Members of Mexican transnational families do not live their lives in a vacuum. . Social networks have powerfully shaped migration. They have helped men, and, increasingly, women, enter the U.S. and they have helped transform entire communities as migration has become broader and less selective.. In an atmosphere of such high dependence on social networks, it would be rare for family relationships not to be affected by neighbors. Indeed, accounts in the previous chapters suggest that while the ties between parents and children are paramount, they can be affected by the judgments and behavior of others. Recall from Chapter 5, for example, that Armando felt his wife's decision to leave him had been set in motion by observing a neighbor's wife doing the same. Migrant families may strive for privacy, but they live within communities on both sides of the border that offer social support, but also subject them to scrutiny and gossip of others.

This chapter explores the building blocks of social networks, neighbors. I do not look not, however, at how they assist migration, but at how they affect relationships within families. Given Mexican families' high degree of privacy about their relationships, neighbors' influence is generally indirect and funneled most often via gossip. Indeed, gossip is, I would suggest, an understudied aspect of transnational communities that can powerfully affect family dynamics. Like the unmet expectations of parents and children, gossip stories often cause friction in family relationships. . Yet at the same time, gossip

can lead parents to reinforce their ties to their children, despite the tensions families experience during their often long separations.

In what follows I explain this apparent paradox. I first describe why neighbors' gossip may be important to transnational families and then consider the functions of gossip, particularly in a transnational setting. Next, I turn to a review of the salient themes in transnational gossip stories. Finally I suggest why we might consider gossip to be a form of social capital for Mexican transnational families.

OF SURVEILLANCE AND INSECURITY

The constraints imposed by physical separation shape the transnational family experience. When parents and children live apart, their primary means of communication is over the phone. Many children, particularly the younger ones, have very limited understanding of their parents' daily experiences. They know their parents went to *el norte* to work, but many do not know where exactly their parents are working. Unless their parents live with other family members, they often do not know who their parents live with. Quite a few of the children I interviewed did not even know where in the United States their parents lived. Parents had more information about their children's lives, having left them in familiar places. Yet their memories of an earlier time often did not correspond with the changing life at home (see also Smith 2006). Their children grow and change more quickly than they anticipate, as evident in the parents' frequent mistakes in sending clothing or shoes too small for their children. Parents relied on snippets of

weekly conversation to gauge how their children were faring without them. Caregivers in Mexico become an important link for parents in evaluating their children's behavior.

Yet as described in Chapter 8, caregivers act primarily as middlewomen with their own stakes in the family migration strategy. The economic motives of relatives are most suspect by migrant parents, who may distrust their reports about the children in their care. Distrust of grandparents is not nearly as great. Yet I found that grandparents also have economic interests in being caregivers, although they were often reluctant to accurately report their economic need to migrant parents so as not to worry them. Grandparents often emphasized the positive experiences of children, rather than their behavioral difficulties. In short, whether their children are with grandparents or relatives, migrant parents may suspect that reports from these middlewomen about their children may not be entirely accurate. Indeed, other research suggests that caregivers often give children distorted explanations of their mothers' absences to protect the children or to better appeal to their loyalties (Mitrani, Santisteban, and Muir 2004).

These uncertainties cloud parent-child relationships during periods of separation. Parents constantly wonder and worry whether or not their children are truly alright without them. Likewise, children worry whether or not their parents will abandon them and start a new family while away. This insecurity is heightened owing to features of the migratory experience compared to other kinds of work that requires parents to travel. In military families, for example, parental absence from children for months and even years may cause numerous stressors, resulting in depression and behavioral difficulties among children similar to those I described in Chapter 6 (Black 1993; Kelley 1994). Yet while away, military parents' lives are ordered by a fairy rigid organizational structure. The

same is true of seafarers; they too may be absent for long periods of time and experience stress, but their families know something about their work routines and may meet and know the families of their co-workers (Sampson 2005). In contrast, during Mexican migration, migrants leave a home community in Mexico to join a diverse Latino community in the United States. While other migrants from the hometown can provide some information prior to migration, it may be inaccurate. Mexican migrants' success stories are often glorified while their difficulties are suppressed because they are often considered personal failures. The generalized belief in the American dream is pervasive (Schmalzbauer 2005b). Relatively speaking, information about the people migrants associate with and the work environment of U.S. labor migrants is at best vague.

As a result, the risk of parents' leaving their old families behind and starting new relationships in the U.S. is omnipresent. I found the fear of abandonment to be palpable in Mexican transnational families, as has been noted by other scholars (D'Aubeterre 2000; Smith 2006). A widespread belief among Mexican immigrants in New Jersey and residents in San Angel is that many mothers and fathers who leave children in Mexico end up abandoning them. According to one migrant mother who had already been reunited with her son:

> There are two types of mothers. There are those, very few, like me, who make the effort to bring their children here. Then there are those who come here and have more children, either with their husband or with another man. These women often forget about their children at home. They abandon them.

Stories of abandonment by migrant fathers were also common, although some fathers were rumored to maintain two families, one in the United States and one in Mexico. One migrant father explained that he was different from most migrant fathers because he remained faithful to his wife. “They get married to a new woman here. I hear these things while we are drinking. They feel guilty about leaving their children. It is not something they feel proud about.”

Given a relatively high level of insecurity due to physical separation, and a generalized fear of abandonment, the role of neighbors is augmented. When direct surveillance between family members is impossible, indirect surveillance of family members by others can become crucial.. Neighbors can potentially provide a relatively disinterested account of how children and parents are faring during periods of separation. These third party accounts are, by definition, gossip.

THE FUNCTIONS OF GOSSIP

Gossip often has a negative connotation. Yet scholarship on gossip suggests that it is essential to think of gossip holistically, in its potentially positive as well as potentially negative forms (Ben-Ze’ev 1994; Bourdillon and Shambare 2002; Hafen 2004; Rosnow and Fine 1973). While a myriad of explanations for the potential uses, or functions, of gossip exist, Fine and Rosnow (1978) identify three as crucial: information, influence, and entertainment.

Information

Gossip, according to Fine and Rosnow (1978), is a "topical assertion about personal qualities or behavior; usually but not necessarily formulated on the basis of hearsay, that is deemed trivial or nonessential within the immediate social context" (p. 161). In other words, gossip is any form of talk about (1) what is generally considered to be private matters of a third party or parties and (2) something tangential to the immediate context of the conversation.

Given this definition it is not difficult to understand how gossip is an informal way of sharing information among group members. By sitting on the corner and chatting about the lives of others, individuals can learn about what is going on around them. According to Louise Collins (1994) "Gossip gives us generalizations, not universal laws, and gossip teaches us about other people in particular, which together with general understanding helps us develop empathy, a morally crucial ability" (p. 112). Moreover, learning about others can help individuals react to others in socially acceptable ways, avoiding embarrassment or emotional distress. For example, if a young girl has a crush on her classmate who recently migrated to the United States but learns through gossip that he has a new girlfriend there, she may be less likely to make her infatuation public knowledge in hopes that he will return to ask her hand in marriage. Individuals may modify their behavior based on the information they hear through informal gossip.

Another crucial feature of gossip is that the information shared is not essential to the immediate context, which allows people to discuss information in a non-threatening and casual manner. Bourdillon and Shambare (2002) suggest that in a Shona community in Zimbabwe, gossip is highly functional as a means for conflict resolution. If a member

of the community feels upset about something another person has done, he or she can let the other individual know they are offended through gossip. The party who has offended is thus "clued" in and can make amends indirectly. In this manner, direct confrontation is avoided and the level of conflict in the community is reduced. In the same vein, information shared in gossip can also alleviate tensions within families. For example, by discussing one migrant father's marital affair, another migrant father who is also having an affair can gauge his friends' and family members' reactions without having to discuss the personal details of his own life. Moreover, if he decides to divulge the information to someone, he has a better sense of how to "soften the blow."

Gossip as an informal mechanism of sharing information, true or not, provides individuals with some important clues about members of their community. Learning about the behavior of third parties may enable individuals to modify their own actions, whether it is to save face from potential embarrassment or to avoid conflict with neighbors or family members in the future.

Influence

The second crucial function of gossip is influence. On the one hand, by participating in gossip, individuals learn the social mores of their community, family or neighbors.

> That gossip stories are a repository of very important sociocultural lore is clear; as such, they provide a powerful means for intragroup community building by providing needed opportunities to community members to deal with important social norms in non-threatening ways. (Hall 1993:59)

Gossip is a way of allowing individuals to vocalize community norms and values. This is perhaps most important when a community or family is experiencing substantive changes, such as those which occur during migration. When individuals participate in gossip they are able to help shape the way communities respond to change. It is a way of allowing each person (at least those who gossip which is almost everyone in a small town like San Angel) to participate in the re-formulization of social norms.

Another form of influence is generally described as social control. In this sense, gossip is a type of informal sanction against individuals who violate community norms. Simply stated, individuals who want to remain connected to the social group must curtail their behavior or pay the consequences of being the subject of gossip.

Gossip can also serve to control activities of group members and to define community values, particularly when gossip is seen as a response to an unequal distribution of power (Goodman 1994; Hafen 2004).

> People gossip about the powerful, rich and famous in order to "cut them down to size." Informal gossip networks flourish in large, bureaucratic organizations as a way of softening, resisting or subverting their depersonalizing tendencies. Gossip offers a passive resistance to many forms of power. (Goodman 1994:5)

The dual-nature of gossip is best illustrated, perhaps, in the case of envy.

Community members often report that the most common cause of gossip is envy (Bourdillon and Shambare 2002; Van Vleet 2003). Van Vleet (2003) explains that in one

Andean community in Bolivia she studied, gossip arose out of envy when someone in the community appeared to be doing better than others. Gossip is humbling and puts the individual back in his or her place. In essence, gossip becomes a community equalizer. Economic pressures and out-migration breed gossip in rural communities, particularly for married couples when men move to cities to work and women remain in the community of origin. "The practice of gossiping is a mode of evaluating people and actions according to particular conceptions of morality" which serves as a bastion against modernization's tendency to enhance inequality among participants in the wage-economy (Van Vleet 2003:500). Gossip can be a way of articulating the continuation of a community identity in the face of the changes that accompany high levels of community out-migration.

Entertainment

When gossip is about information and influence, it ultimately articulates a certain set of community norms. However, gossip is not only informative and controlling, but also can be fun. Gossip has been often likened to humor (Hafen 2004; Morreall 1994). Morreall (1994:56) suggests that humor and gossip are similar in that they share a narrative form, primarily please the imagination, often use the element of surprise and make hypothetical explorations of often-taboo topics. The simple act of sharing a good piece of gossip is much like the social experience of telling a good joke. People enjoy positive reinforcement from their social group in both instances.

Practicing gossip can also be a good way to spend time with friends, particularly in Latin America. Hall (1993) finds that *chismeando* (gossiping) among Dominican girls actually follows a rhythmic beat, and is often marked by the syncopation of

handclapping. She likens the performance of gossip to that of jazz and suggests that through the practice of gossip young women can "share in the development of their socio-cultural identities" (p. 79). Thus, gossip, like most modes of entertainment, may be an expression of shared culture and even "an aesthetic experience" (Morreall 1994:57).

Functions of Gossip in a Transnational Context

How does gossip function as information, influence, and entertainment in the transnational context? First and foremost, information sharing becomes more important than it might otherwise be..As individuals are physically separated, they cannot rely on direct experience in relevant social contexts to keep abreast of what is going on here and there. Those in Mexico rely on gossip for accounts of migrant family members' activities since they cannot evaluate their family members' activities themselves. Particularly important is gossip about whether or not the migrant is working successfully and diligently. Accounts of migrants' spending money on drinking or extramarital affairs suggest to family members at home that migrants' personal motivations are beginning to outweigh family's needs.

Migrants also rely on gossip to learn of happenings in their home communities. Facing isolation in a new context, migrants' identities in their home communities are particularly important (Goldring 2001; Schiller and Fouron 1999). Yet in order to stay connected to their community, they must participate in third-party accounts of home. In addition, by hearing about who has left town and who has remained, migrants gain a valuable resource that may facilitate prospects as a migrant worker. For example, if a migrant frustrated with employment opportunities learns that a neighbor who recently returned home to Mexico for a visit was bragging that jobs abound in the small

community where he or she recently moved, he may decide to contact his neighbor about a possible relocation. In essence, in transnational communities, gossip is an extremely valuable source of information that enhances migrants' use of social networks.

Transnational gossip is also a means for group entertainment. In rural Mexico life is often slow and routine.

> In Mexico, residents often sat on their stoops labeling different aspects of their surroundings as "ugly", "boring", "backward," and "closed." They contrasted this reality with the idea of an elsewhere drawn from the trips they have made to larger cities nearby, the soap operas they follow on television, or the migrants' stories about clean streets, shopping malls, escalators, planes, dishwashers and cleaning products. (Malkin 2004:80)

In San Angel, few newcomers arrive in town and aside from those coming from and going to the United States, the population is quite static. Thus, gossip provides a regular source of entertainment, and gossip about migrants and their experiences is interesting news. Transnational gossip has the power to connect those who stay in Mexico to another way of life. Although from the vantage point of Mexico, life in the United States may seem exciting, migrants in New Jersey often spend most of their time at their jobs. I was often told by those I interviewed that "my life is the US is all work" (see also Malkin 2004). Thus, stories of a more relaxed and carefree life in Mexico are perhaps as important psychologically to migrants as the need for news of a faster paced world is to those who remain in Mexico.

Gossip in the transnational context may also have important influence on community members who find themselves living in different environments with often vastly different social norms. Whether the subject of gossip or the gossiper, transnational gossip connects people together. Even when talked about in a negative manner, being the subject of gossip pulls individuals into a social web of those who matter in the community. The transnational community in which each family operates is thus defined by gossip. Despite the unsavory experience of being discussed while not present, gossip puts people on the transnational map. Migrants cannot disappear into the great unknown of *el norte* when gossip ties them to home.

In addition, the community solidarity articulated in transnational gossip may be similar to what Van Vleet (2003) described in the Andean community as counteracting potentially divisive outside influences. On the one hand, like Van Vleet's respondents, many Mexicans I interviewed suggested that transnational gossip arose out of spite. According to one young woman in San Angel, for example "Sometimes it [gossip] is true but sometimes there are jealous people who invent it to hurt other people. They don't like to see other people get ahead." Migration clearly has the potential to divide a town like San Angel between winners and losers, between those whose relatives in the US are responsible to family members at home and those who are not. One the other hand, transnational gossip defines some stable norms in the community that all members, successful economically or not, should abide by. For example, in San Angel I was told gossip about two return migrants who had rather cocky attitudes; they had allegedly achieved their success through illegal means. One young man, whom I had actually met in the United States, said he hated San Angel for being so backward and that he only

visited to see his family. Others told me that he had bought a number of items on stolen credit cards, only to have them repossessed by the authorities. The other young man stood out at all the town dances for his boisterous appearance and sharp dress, and had allegedly returned to San Angel after being caught stealing car radios. In both cases, these young men were implicitly criticized for their dubious means of getting ahead.

In short, transnational gossip articulates community norms, or rules, to accompany the migration narrative. This is not to say that these norms are fixed. "Gossiping is . . . a creative endeavor in which relationships and meanings are negotiated among many coauthors who have specific histories of interaction with each other and with the protagonist of their stories" (Van Vleet 2003:500). Through gossip, community members articulate norms of behavior and, at times, revise them according to the transnational experience. I now turn to what gossip stories reveal about the rules of the migration narrative for Mexican transnational family members.

GOSSIP STORIES

Gossip is typically considered to be a characteristic of small communities. While members of transnational families I interviewed came from different types of Mexican communities, from the rural town of San Angel to the more cosmopolitan urban environment where Armando and his family lived, they described a surprisingly similar role of gossip in their families. It appears that the dense social networks so formative to Mexican migration patterns to the United States create a dynamic similar to that in small town communities.. In the transnational sphere, whether families come from small towns or big cities, gossip is powerful and often transformative.

The Power of Gossip in a Small Town in Mexico

Gossip (in the broadest definition of the term) among Mexican migrants in New Jersey often seemed an ordinary feature of the immigrant community. Early on in my research I came to value gossip sessions for their communicative features. Listening in on migrants' gossip, I learned about the comings and goings of different family members and the issues they felt were important. Not only was gossip central to the news of immigrant families, but being party to migrants' gossip also made me, as an "outside" researcher, feel party to "insider" information[33]. It helped to cement a growing bond between myself and some of the migrant parents that participated in this study.

It wasn't until I spent a number of months in San Angel that I learned why being a gossip, or a *chismosa,* often has such a negative connotation. *Chismeando* is not always the simple sharing of information. In San Angel, gossip was not always based on truth and was often quite malicious in intent. In dense social groups like those in the small community of San Angel and other arenas where the families I interviewed operated, the, *chismes* may be both defining and haunting.

One of my own experiences with local *chisme* illustrates the potential power dynamics of gossip stories. After visiting a school in a small community not far from San Angel, I was invited to return to talk to the students about migration. As there was no public transportation to the town, one of the teachers in the two-room school house offered to pick me up so I didn't have to pay for the taxi on my next visit. On the ride I learned that the teacher Macedonio, a tall man clearly not originally from the Mixteca based upon his height and dress, was doing his master's thesis in education on school

[33] There is a lengthy tradition in ethnographic research of situating the researcher on an outsider/insider continuum. For discussions of the insider/outside dilemma see Bourgois 1991, Geertz 1973, Marcus 1998, Patillo-McCoy 2000.

desertion due to international migration, a topic related to my own work. After the visit, both the Director and Macedonio dropped me off and they invited me to the first of the *posadas* in their town, which started December 1st, two weeks before they did in San Angel.

I was excited to go because it would be my first *posada* in Mexico. I invited my son's nanny to come with us, since she too wasn't from the area and was anxious for social activity. We drove to the town with Macedonio, who took us up to where the townspeople were singing and holding candles around the image of the Virgin Mary, with the image taken from house to house every night during the *posadas*. In between the singing, the town band provided background music typical in the region: a rather solemn beat on drums and trumpets. Men set off fireworks, and the women handed out party favors for the kids with juice and chips. The event was over quickly, within perhaps a half hour. Then Macedonio took us back to San Angel. It seemed only proper to invite him in and offer him something to drink in return for his kindness. It was the type of hospitable gesture I was used to making with Mexican families I met in New Jersey. Within a minute it was obvious I had made a cultural mistake. When I introduced Macedonio to the couple I lived with, he got stern, unwelcoming greetings. Macedonio got the message, so we said thank you and goodbye rather quickly and that was that.

After that incident I didn't see Macedonio or talk to him again for months. But, from that day on, whenever I got a phone call from a man, no matter who called, I was told it was the teacher from x-town. I felt slightly bothered by this instant reputation because it seemed there was no way I could meet with Macedonio to talk about his work on drop outs in the region, without furthering my reputation, which I was anxious not to

do given I still had to do interviews in town. I wanted to remain as neutral as possible to increase my access to families. In short, I felt frustrated that local *chisme* would prevent me from developing a friendship with a potential colleague.

A few weeks before I left San Angel for good, the family began to joke about Macedonio more vigorously. There is a saying in San Angel that once a woman from out-of-town bathes in the river, she never leaves. Since I frequented the river often during March, the dry season, the family I lived with joked during those last weeks that I wasn't really going to leave. Although Macedonio wasn't from the Mixteca, he worked here, they reasoned, and this was close enough. According to them, I would never leave San Angel because I would stay in town to marry Macedonio. Since I was nearly done with my work in town, I was able to laugh more easily at the joke than a few months earlier. I retorted that I would defy all local hoaxes and prove them wrong.

My last week in town, I was giving reports to all the schools where I had distributed surveys, and met with Macedonio since the Director was unavailable due to imminent talks of a teachers' strike[34]. We laughed about the *chisme,* and decided that *chisme* or not, we would enjoy the afternoon. There is a dam in the river up near the town where he worked which was reputed to be a nice spot for an outing. I hadn't been there yet, so we went on a picnic. Driving through his town I could feel the repressive weight of all eyes fixed on us. I left San Angel two days later and so the confirmation of how gossip travels like wildfire came through an email: Macedonio wrote that after our trip to the dam people claimed we had been a couple all year and that he was going to leave his

[34] While in Oaxaca, the teachers I met participated in a number of small strikes and other organizing activities. Teacher salaries in the region were insufficient, equaling that of skilled blue collar workers. On all my visits to the schools, teachers asked about how they could migrate to the US (see also Smith 2006). It wasn't until the following year, however, that teachers held a major strike in Oaxaca, resulting in violent conflict in the fall of 2006.

post at the school to go with me in the United States. On a good note, his students apparently approved of the match.

In the end, my experience with gossip in San Angel was harmless. I felt the pull of gossip, particularly before I left town, but did not experience its consequences, because I had an exit from the community. This was not the only time I have been affected by Mexican gossip, and other more personal episodes have been similar. I have been able to shrug off any potential consequences since I have a number of social circles in which to operate.

While for those living in communities like San Angel, gossip may be extremely powerful, it is possible that for migrants, its hold is markedly weaker. After all, like me, migrants have an exit. They operate outside of the world of San Angel (or the given community in which they live), by living their lives in multiple social circles both in the United States and in Mexico. As Robert Smith (2006:122) has shown, the roles and expectations of Mexican men, women, and youth "are always context dependent" and may shift according to conditions in which they are under negotiation.

Yet I found that migrants, unlike me, could not so easily shrug off community gossip, although many described their attempts to do so by referring to stories as *el chisme del pueblo*, or small town gossip. Teresa's story exemplifies the lasting impact gossip may have on migrants' lives despite the possibilities of shifting gender ideologies in transnational spaces.

Teresa[35] is mother to three children in Mexico. Her two older children live with Teresa's ex-husband; her youngest son, born to another man, lives with her mother. Teresa explained that her fall from grace, which prompted her migration to New Jersey,

[35] Teresa is not a member of a family constellation.

started while her husband was working in *el norte*. Teresa lived with her in-laws in a small town in Veracruz. People, mostly her husband's family, started rumors that she was with other men while her husband, a good 20 years her senior, was away. Teresa claimed she wasn't doing anything bad, until the pressure of the rumors became too great.

> I stayed at home and played with the girls there, but then they invented gossip that I was going around with other guys. Until I decided that since they insisted that I slept around with other guys, that was it. So I did it (laughs).

In Teresa's account, gossip was so powerful that she ultimately acted upon it, similar to what I did when I decided to go on a picnic with Macedonio knowing that doing so would feed into the false reputation I had gotten. In Teresa's case, however, her actions subsequently transformed her life, resulting in her divorce and migration to the United States. In the end, this gossip also shaped the relationship Teresa was able to have with the children she left behind. While Teresa had contact with her youngest son who lived with her mother, her damaged reputation enraged her ex-husband so much that he refused to allow her to contact her older children and he rejected any gifts she sent for them.

Even in the United States, Teresa seemed to feel she could not shake the stigma of her earlier experiences. At the time of our interviews in New Jersey, Teresa was dating a man from Honduras, with whom she described having many relationship troubles. She told me her sister was encouraging her to leave him, but Teresa complained, "but then if one goes out with a lot of men here they say you are a whore, excuse the language."

Teresa went on to explain that earlier she had been living with another man whom she really liked.

> He was from Oaxaca, but his family found out that he was with a woman who had already been married and who had three children. He said it didn't matter, what mattered to him was me, and nothing more. But I ended it. I had already had so many problems like that [with in-laws] and I didn't want to go through it again.

I expressed surprise to Teresa that her reputation mattered so much in the United States because I was under the impression that it was easier for women here, but she explained, "Well, it may be more difficult in Mexico. But people here care about it [your reputation] too." Teresa felt tied to a troubled relationship to someone outside of her social network because she feared that leaving him would affect the way others in her social network viewed her and, perhaps, how she viewed herself.

Thus while migration may provide a way of escaping a bad reputation, as it was for Teresa, it was not a true exit like leaving San Angel was for me. Transnational community networks are strong; people migrate with the help of family and friends from their hometowns. Even when displaced all the way to Central New Jersey, families continue to talk and update each other during the weekly phone calls home. The importance of contacts with neighbors at home is magnified for transnational parents, who are eager to maintain connections with their children they have left behind. They may not feel they receive adequate information from their children's caregivers, and thus seek further contact with neighbors and friends to weigh the impact of their absences on

their families. Once in the United States, social control by the community definitely may weaken to some extent (Hirsch 2003). However, the power of information sharing while enduring the uncertainty of physical separation should not be underestimated. *Chisme* in the transnational circuit is something to be contended with.

Gossip and Marriage

The most common topic of transnational gossip is about marital relationships. Gossip is most prominent when spouses are separated by migration: i.e. when the husband migrates and his wife and children remain in Mexico. Husbands allegedly cheat on wives with other women in the United States. In the worst-case scenario she is an American (which refers to any woman not born in Mexico). This is seen as the ultimate insult because it represents a man's choice of a "sophisticated" and "modern" woman over traditional ties to his wife and community. Most often, however, a man gets involved with another Mexican woman in the United States. This involvement is never viewed as resulting from pre-existing problems in the marriage, but as an act of abandonment accompanying migration. It is the symbolic replacement of the old ways (wife and children) for the new. Similar gossip stories about migrant mothers did not exist as none left husbands back in Mexico during migration.

Interviews with men in the United States show that gossip about their affairs, founded and unfounded, has the potential to seriously affect men's relationships with their families at home. The effect of alleged extra-marital affairs on marital relationships seemed to depend mostly on their visibility within the men's social circles. One migrant father, for example, said his wife and children think he had an affair with his sister-in-law, although he insisted that he simply helped her out when she was alone and pregnant.

He took her to the hospital for the birth, and as a result everyone started to say that he was the father of the child, a fact he denied. Another migrant father lived for a time with his wife and father-in-law in the United State. He took a number of lovers, and even considered leaving his wife for one. Neither relationship worked out; eventually the lover left and he and his wife separated. In Mexico, his mother-in-law told me that she liked him because he was financially responsible for the family despite marital difficulties. But she said her husband, the migrant's father-in-law, did not agree. "He [husband] says that . . . [son-in-law] cheated on her [daughter] all the time. My husband says he could tell because he would come home smelling like other women." Both of these men's alleged affairs were witnessed by social network members. In contrast, another migrant father, whose brief affair with a Puerto Rican woman was described in Chapter 4, went on to describe a more recent affair with a Mexican woman. He spoke of the woman so wistfully that I believed him to be genuinely in love with her, although she had since returned to her husband in Mexico. The backdrop, of course, is that his wife and children in Mexico never learned of either lover. Unlike most others I interviewed, this father lived alone with a Puerto Rican man and told me that he is isolated from others from his town. Whether the affair has witnesses among those in the transnational social network connecting the migrant to home appears to make a difference.

Accusations of infidelity do flow, however, in both directions. For fathers, news of a wife's infidelity during his absence can be extremely hurtful. For example, a migrant father of four boys ages four to nine who lived with his wife in a small city of Oaxaca, had just found out that his wife was with another man when I interviewed him. "What hurt the most is that I was the last one in my entire family to know about it." This migrant

father didn't seem a particularly good family man; his brothers had previously told me he was a drunk. But he insisted that he had never cheated on his wife while away, "I wanted to be faithful to her," he told me. "Not until now have I thought about having another woman here." What eats away at him, however, is not his wife's lack of loyalty, but the moral implications of his wife's infidelity. "Now I regret having had a family with her. It isn't because I don't love my children. No, I love them a lot. But it is the model she is for my children. I don't want that for my children." Another father I interviewed lived openly with another women but discretely asked me to keep quiet about the relationship if I ever met his wife. I was perplexed given his loving description of his wife and children in Mexico; I found out later that he had only started living with another woman after he learned (through transnational gossip spread by his family) that she had cheated on him first.

In Mexico, the threat of marital infidelity by migrant husbands is a tangible fear. Some women have come to accept this. Yolanda said that she was at first hurt at rumors of her husband Esteban's infidelities. "Yeah, it pissed me off. But now I am resigned as long as I don't see it, and as long as he stays responsible for us here." Yolanda feels lucky that her husband hasn't completely abandoned her in terms of financial support. But for others, a husband's infidelity is demeaning especially if he has established a formal relationship abroad. The new "wife" competes with the old "wife" for a husband's limited resources and frustrates the promise of economic mobility embedded in the migration narrative.

To illustrate: when I met one of Armando's sister-in-laws in Mexico, all I knew is that her husband lived in the United States and she and her daughter lived with Doña

Mica. When I asked after her husband, her eyes filled with tears. Another sister-in-law explained my mistake in a hushed voice: apparently her husband, Armando's brother, has another wife and child in the United States. After I was "clued in" to her husband's infidelity, she composed herself and answered my questions, speaking almost desperately about wanting to join her husband in the United States. She claimed that her husband had said he would take her north and that she was waiting for him to do so. Seven months later, she moved out of Doña Mica's house and back with her own mother. This time when we met, she described herself as a single mother and, while still receiving some money from her husband, she sold fruit on the street to support her daughter.

In San Angel, I interviewed four single mothers who "lost" their husbands to migration and I heard similar stories of many others. In a casual conversation with one of the nurses in town, she explained bitterly how she became a single mother.

JD: There are a lot of people from here in the north, right?

Yeah. The men go from here to there and get other women there and leave their wives abandoned here.

JD: (pause) Is your husband over there?

Yes. He went there and married some other woman from Veracruz. They have two kids now.

JD: Do you have children with him?

Yes, three. And he comes back every year to the town and brings his wife and children. They were just here and left again.

JD: That is too bad. Do you think about going there too?

Yeah, I would like to.

JD: You should go there and get a man as well.

No I should go there and tell off his wife there for getting involved with a married man.

JD: Don't you think that he is the guilty one?

No way. The women over there should know who they are getting involved with and not believe everything he says. They should make sure that they know if he has a family first.

As apparent from this conversation, women in San Angel were angry at husbands who were unfaithful. However, they tended to blame women in the United States for getting involved with married men nearly as much as their husbands.

When husbands migrate, women in San Angel and elsewhere not only worried about their husband's potential abandonment. They also had to be careful not to be accused of cheating on their husbands who were away. One grandmother I interviewed described how her daughter's reputation was ruined by town gossip when she returned home without her husband for their daughter. Apparently, people in town told her husband in the United States that she cheated on him during the trip. As a result, he ended the relationship and a year later returned to town and married another woman. The grandmother explained, "My husband [also in the United States] doesn't let me work. Before there was a time when they did to me what they did to my daughter–the gossip– and he stopped supporting me [financially]. So I went to work for like three months. But,

he didn't like it. So then I said to him, are you going to believe gossip more than you believe me? After that he got better."

Women in San Angel often complained that they were falsely accused of infidelity. For example, one grandmother I interviewed told me that when husbands are away and a woman goes out, such as to a town dance or other social event, everyone starts talking about her and people will tell her husband in the United States about it. Some women, she said, are actually guilty of infidelity, but those who don't "pay the price for others' sins." After a number of months living in San Angel, I began to doubt that many women actually did cheat on their husbands, since one could be accused of a romantic relationship for simply talking to a man in public (or, as I learned, getting a ride to and from work).

In the end, however, it was what people said, more than perhaps what they actually did, that disrupted marital relationships from a distance. Both men and women participate in transnational gossip, and accusations of infidelity run in both directions: they are aimed at migrant men as well as wives who remain in Mexico. This type of gossip has the potential to create high levels of distrust in marital relationships. Frank (2005b) has recently reported findings that marital dissolution may be twice as high among Mexican migrants with moderate to extensive experience in the United States compared to those with little or no migration experience. Yet despite town gossip, many couples separated internationally remain together (see also Pribilsky 2004). This may be particularly true for couples with children. Frank (2005b) found that the presence of children is inversely related to union dissolution among migrant couples. Yolanda's husband, for example, continues to support her financially; their two daughters described

a high level of affection for their father. This is despite the fact that, if one believes town gossip, he has allegedly cheated on Yolanda repeatedly and she cheats on him regularly as well.

Accusations

A case which exemplifies the power of *chisme* to both create discord in a marriage while ultimately uniting the family is that of Zalatiel and Araceli[36], a couple from San Angel with two boys, aged 11 and 13 at the time of the interview. Although the family now lives together, Zalatiel had worked in the U.S. for four years before returning to Mexico five years before. When I was in San Angel, Zalatiel had a steady job for a water purifier in town. I knew he had been in New York because every time he delivered water to the house where I lived he would greet me in English. More often than not, I did not understand anything he said, but I would nod and smile and say something back in English anyway. In return, Zalatiel smiled and nodded enthusiastically indicating that he understood what I was saying.

A tall man who I guessed to be in his mid-30s, Zalatiel had a youthful appearance and didn't seem particularly marked by hard labor as many men in the region were. One day I mentioned to him that I was interviewing parents in San Angel who had left their children in town while in the United States. Zalatiel commented, "Oh yeah. That affects the family a lot. I know because it happened to me and that is why I came back." Zalatiel cautiously agreed to an interview after asking whether it would be alone or with his wife and I offered to do whatever was most comfortable.

A week or so later I visited Zalatiel and sat on the porch talking to him and his wife, Araceli, for close to two hours. At first, I only assumed the stern young woman was

[36] Araceli and Zalatiel are not members of a family constellation.

his wife, for I was not formally introduced. She sat gravely in a chair placed equidistant between the seven feet that separated me from Zalatiel, doing needlepoint and staring stoically ahead keeping one eye on each of us. When I eventually involved her in the conversation, I learned she was my age–28. Once she relaxed, I noticed that she was quite beautiful.

Zalatiel explained that he is not from San Angel and had met his wife when they were both working in Mexico City. When he decided to migrate, he brought his wife back to her family so she wouldn't be lonely. Zalatiel gave a lengthy description of working in the New York City for a Korean owned fruit market at $250 a week, after earning a raise from $180 due to his English skills. He ended his story saying, "Then I had to come back because I felt that my family was disintegrating."

According to Zalatiel, "When I first arrived [to New York], she cried a lot over the phone and said that she wanted me to go home." Araceli joined the conversation and explained, "I lasted for a year, but I couldn't any more. I felt lonely . . . I started to work. First I went to help some teachers in town and then I went to the city to work as a cook." The couple's children remained with Araceli's mother in town. Zalatiel and Araceli communicated less and less, since he didn't have a phone in New York and she didn't have a phone in Mexico. Zalatiel said, "I felt bad and sometimes we fought over the phone. Then I felt like something wasn't right in the family. I decided to come back."

But when he came home, Zalatiel wasn't received well by the family. His wife didn't want to see him and didn't want to touch him. His youngest son, six when he came home, didn't recognize him. When Zalatiel got up to offer me a soda, Araceli gave her version of what happened while her husband was away.

> What has always bothered me is when people don't tell me the truth. I am the kind of person who never asks where do you work or how much do you earn or what do you spend it on. And then this woman would say you don't know what your husband does or what he earns. She would say that her sons live with him and she said he did this and that.
>
> So that is when the thorn pricked me . . . and so much they would tell me that he had another wife and child there that with time I began to believe them. And what bothered me the most was that he never wanted to give me a phone number where I could call him. He told me he didn't have one.
>
> Well, he did once give me a number that was only for emergencies and I got so desperate that I decided to call. And when I dialed a woman answered and I heard her call, "Zalatiel" and I got so mad because I didn't know who this woman was and to find out about it from someone else . . .

Back in his chair, Zalatiel explained that he only rented a room from the woman. According to him the *chisme* started because he moved out of the apartment he shared with some men from town because they drank too much. Once on his own, no one saw him and this is when the gossip started. Araceli continued. "When he came back, I hated him. I wanted to kick him out . . . But what pissed me off," added Araceli, "was that the

children talked about their father in all the time. It was my dad this and my dad that and it made me mad because I was so upset with him."

When Zalatiel did come home his children did not receive him well either. It took a while to win the family back, which he was able to do by convincing them that "we all deserve a second chance." The migration wasn't a total loss; the couple owns two houses, one in San Angel and one in Zalatiel's hometown, both financed by his remittances. But Zalatiel said the price he paid for leaving home was too high. Things are better now. "It is like everything was erased." But, although Zalatiel at times wants to go back north, he said that for now he will stay because he doesn't want to leave his children (soon to be teenagers) at a time when they need a father as a role model.

After I interviewed Zalatiel and Araceli I was heartened. The couple had clearly been through hard times but had resolved things enough to be able to discuss what happened with an outsider. I even titled my field notes that evening, "An Optimistic Story." But over the next few days I started to wonder whether or not Zalatiel had really cheated on his wife or not. It suddenly seemed important to know "the truth" to evaluate how town gossip affects marriages and children's relationships with their migrant parents.

However, I couldn't quite figure out a way of asking Zalatiel directly, "So did you really cheat on your wife?" A little over a month later I had the opportunity to ask a friend in town if he knew anything about Zalatiel and his alleged affair. Apparently, or at least according to town gossip, I had it all wrong. While Zalatiel was away, his wife was the one who had another man, a *Sancho*, as they call a man who steps in on a marriage. I asked my friend if he was sure, and whether or not it could be unfounded rumors. "They

acted like a couple. She would feed him and when she killed a pig or a goat, he was the one who would go and clean it for her. It was obvious to everyone." According to town gossip, Araceli was still with her *Sancho*, but was better about hiding it now that her husband was home.

Zalatiel and Araceli's story suggests that the truth of the infidelities may matter only to those parties involved, the husband and wife. Given the high levels of insecurity accompanying U.S. migration, gossip about the sexual behaviors of couples during periods of separation, founded or unfounded, affects the reputation of migrant men and women left behind and creates tension in the marital relationship. Equally significant in their story is that geographic separation–even when Zalatiel chose to disassociate himself from the other migrant men from San Angel–did not diminish gossip but rather seemed to increase it. Gossip flies on transnational family circuits in both directions and the doubt instilled by physical separation during marriage makes the influence of gossip even stronger. Transnational gossip often involved harsher evaluations of women than of men, , as Araceli's reputation was ongoing and Zalatiel's was not. Furthermore, the tension produced by gossip may not result in a failed marriage. As in Zalatiel and Dalia's case, it also can bring families back together again.

What Children Hear

Mainly transnational gossip was about parents' sexual relations–or alleged sexual relations–and had a significant impact on relationships between husbands and wives. As far as I could tell, children did not spread rumors about their own parents. Moreover, and perhaps more remarkably, gossip about children's behavior during their parents' absences was not common. While from time to time I heard reference to children's experiences,

they were mostly understated, perhaps for the low level of entertainment value in discussing children's problems. Or perhaps, as has been suggested by Newman et al. (2004), adults "do not really want to hear that their kids are behaving badly." Fearing that parents will get defensive about their children, "neighbors often withhold what they know" about children's behavior (p.122).

In contrast, everyone seemed to enjoy talking about adults' alleged sexual affairs. Neighbors showed no concern that gossip about sex would lead to defensive reactions among parents. Children were, however, affected by gossip, even if they were not the subject of it. They were not immune to community *chismes* about their parents. In fact, transnational gossip, I would suggest, affected children's relationship with parents from a distance as much as it affected their parents' relationships with each other.

Mothers in Mexico are the brokers for migrant fathers' relationships with their children. When mothers are upset or doubt their migrant husbands, their children often do as well. One migrant father, described above, said the rumors about him and his sister-in-law affected his relationship with his oldest daughter when she migrated and joined him in New Jersey. "The oldest had her doubts." To this day, his daughter doesn't live with him and he complained that she doesn't trust or respect his fatherly advice. Another father of four teens also told me his wife suspected he had another wife in the United States. When he last went home, "My two older boys came to me together and they said: dad, if you have another wife, we don't want you here. You can leave."

Children are thus not immune to community rumors. As they do not have direct experience with their parents except over the telephone, children are often eager to pick up any news about their parents. When I visited Brian and Tina, for example, both

teenagers pumped me for information about their mother, questions which I tried to tactfully avoid answering due to confidentiality issues. Moreover, migrant parents often want to protect their children from changes in their lives post-migration. Recall from Chapter 5 that Armando, who migrated two years before his wife, said that when he was first away, his wife said bad things about him to his children. "I don't think my wife did it to be spiteful, but she would tell the children I was irresponsible." After she left him for another man, Armando struggled for months about how to tell his children in Mexico about the break-up. Finally, he decided it was time to tell his oldest son what happened. "When I talked to him, I said, 'Son I have something to tell you. The thing is your mother and I aren't together anymore.' And he said, 'I already know, dad. The kids at school told me.'"

Although children may hear rumors about parents from various sources, interviews suggest that unlike adults, children only believed stories when migrant parents confirmed them. One migrant father said that his 17-year-old son had heard gossip about him, "He tells me that there is a lot of gossip that I have other women here. He hears this and asks me about it, but I tell him it isn't true." The 15-year-old daughter of a migrant father said her maternal grandmother tells her bad things about her father all the time because her migrant uncles talk to her grandmother separately. I asked her what they say about her father. "Whatever is to her advantage." She explained that it doesn't make her feel bad, "Because I go and ask my father and it is over because he says it isn't true. I trust my father more."

Since children tend to discount rumors about their parents, when migrant parents confirm their fears it can be a source of serious disappointment and cause children to lose

trust in their parents. I interviewed both Jose and Elsa in the United States and then met their two children, 13-year-old Tina and 15-year-old Brian in Mexico. Jose was the first to migrate; he sent for Elsa after she allegedly had an affair while he was away. After attempting to fix their marital problems in the United States, they subsequently separated. Tina explained on our second interview, after I had visited her family about four times, how migration affected her parents' relationship:

> Well, my mom left because of a situation that she sometimes (pause). First, because she didn't tend to us, she would go out–she had–I don't know what happened to her. She was good with us but after my dad left, she changed a lot. Then she started to neglect us a little. At first we thought that she was going to spoil us more, you see, because my dad wasn't around. Like we were going to [get to] do things . . . but no. Then things were different. When we got home from school, we were hungry. Then she would come home like at 12 at night, or maybe at 10. Real late she would come home. So the problem was that she didn't take care of us.
>
> *JD:* What did you say to her?
>
> Well, I asked her what was going on. Then she told me, that, well, I couldn't really get involved in her life. No, so I said do what you want. That was when my dad found out what was going on and she went there [to the United States]. But there [United States] it was the same. She got separated from my father. One

> thing, my father hit her over there and because there you cannot hit women, they can put you in jail for that, so my mom separated from him after that. She lives somewhere else, but she calls us every month. She rarely calls us. And, if she calls, it is a really quick conversation.

Although I had interviewed Elsa while she was still with Jose and contemplating a separation, when I interviewed Jose, the couple had separated and Jose told me that he had a new girlfriend, an Italian-American woman. Elsa, I heard from the *chisme* circuits in New Brunswick, was said to be a bit "wild" after her separation because she was often seen out at local clubs and parties. When I first interviewed her son Brian in September 2004, he, like Tina, expressed disappointment in his mother because she didn't call very often. But, unlike Tina, he felt more affectionate towards Elsa. Brian said he liked to talk more with his mother than with his father.

> [I like to talk] more with my mother, maybe because she spoiled us a lot, more than our father. Because he was more, like, strong. So then, when he calls it is like hello. And when my mom calls it is like, hey, it is so good that you called, how are you and all that. Like there is a different type of communication between mother and son.

When I visited the family again in Mexico in April 2005, Doña Ursula told me that a number of changes had occurred. For one, Elsa had moved in with a boyfriend.

When I asked if I knew him, Doña Ursula showed me a number of photographs her daughter Elsa sent over the holidays. From my field notes:

> Doña Ursula brings out some pictures and the two of us look at them. There are two packets; basically one with various poses of Elsa who looks quite good. She seems happy, young and carefree posing in front of the New York City skyline and in front of the waves of the Jersey shore. The only picture of the boyfriend is one that Doña Ursula hands me; he is a tall, stern looking man. I say I cannot really tell from the picture [if I had met him] and I put it back with the rest that I am flipping through.
>
> Doña Ursula asks for the picture back. "It is just that I keep these apart because I don't like the kids seeing these pictures." I nod, although think to myself that it seems a little overprotective. Then Doña Ursula hands me the second pile of prints, which I flip through like the first. These are pictures of Elsa with her boyfriend. But I immediately see why Doña Ursula has kept them apart. In some of the pictures the couple is in full French kiss mode and others depict their bodies plastered together, with Elsa, whenever possible, smiling at the camera. One of the last prints depicts Elsa naked in the bathtub. She is alone and sitting with her arms over her legs so no intimate parts are exposed; she looks shocked but coquettishly at the camera. The next picture depicts the boyfriend pointing and laughing. I hand the pictures back.

In my interview with Brian on that same visit, he explained how he found out about his mother's new relationship. He implied he had heard about it first through family gossip, and used this to learn the truth from his mother.

JD: Did she tell you about it or what?

No she didn't. She didn't want to tell us because she thought that it would hurt us mentally. But, no.

JD: So how did you find out?

I found out because I asked her a lot . . . In the middle of December I started to ask, "Why don't you call. Why are you so quiet?" And she told me because . . . of this and that. But I kept on and kept on. It was then she told me she is with someone else and that she lives better and all that.

Elsa was not the only one whose life had changed significantly during the past few months. Jose had also become more intimately involved with his girlfriend, who became pregnant and delivered a baby boy in the spring of that year. Brian at age 16 had a confrontation with his father, which he described as follows.

Dad said he had a son, you know? And it was, and I was always, like no and no. I mean my sister and I we never believed him. And well, I, yes I got mad when I found out because he said he is going to come (home) because he has a problem in the US and I thought he was going to come back because, you know how they are in the US, they were going to send him back, and the other thing never came

> to my mind. So then he said he had a son. And I thought it was a joke, because he always jokes, you know. Then, well, he said it seriously. And I was quiet like this. And he said it was because he was in moments of desperation and sadness. And I don't understand–it is so ignorant, if he cannot make it with us, much less with another one.

That spring, Brian told me that his attitude towards his mother and father hadn't changed much. I observed otherwise. In September, Brian had looked forward to his mothers' calls, whereas by April, he was ambivalent about talking to either parent. In September, Brian explained lots of details about his mother's life, where she worked and what she did, but in April, he said he didn't know anything about her. In September, Brian missed his parents but felt that he had a lot of family support; in April Brian said he felt alone and abandoned by both his mother and father. I believe the gossip, and the realization that what people said was true, is what changed Brian's attitude.

Brian was disappointed in his father, but he seemed to take the changes in his father's life more in stride. He was much harsher in his judgments of his mother, which no doubt reflects different cultural views of male and female infidelity. From the transcript of our interview:

> *JD:* Would you say you trust your mom more than you dad or your dad more than your mom?
>
> Neither of them.
>
> *JD:* And affection?

A little, very little bit, for my dad.

JD: And your mom?

With my mom, well, not really.

JD: Do you love your mom?

Little, just a little bit.

JD: Do you feel like she loves you?

Uh uh. No.

JD: Do you love your dad?

Yes.

JD: Do you feel like your dad loves you?

Sometimes I say–that no, but well yes. He is the only one who supports us.

Like the gendered double standard in children's evaluations of mothers' and fathers' absences, gender role expectations of women and men affect how children interpret confirmation of gossip about their parents. Transnational gossip appeared to be more critical of women than men. So too confirmation of gossip more drastically affects children's relationships with their mothers.

Summary

Children–like their parents–are not immune to gossip about migrant parents' extramarital relationships during migration. Yet the actual truth of the gossip is not terribly important in determining husbands' relationships with their wives. Some husbands "cheated on" their wives and "got away with it" because they had affairs outside of the transnational network which connected them with home or because they

continued to financially support their families in Mexico. Other times, husbands and wives had significant problems over alleged affairs even though they appeared to be faithful. In other words, talk was enough to cause a disturbance in a marriage from a distance.

However, for children, whether gossip is founded or unfounded is highly important. Most children write off gossip and trust what their parents tell them rather than what community members say. They may confront migrant parents with stories of infidelity and feel reassured when their parents' deny such allegations. However, when gossip turns out to be true, it hits like a bucket of cold water. Children's relationships with their parents, as in Brian's case, can be permanently damaged after they have dismissed *chisme* and defended their parents, at least in their own minds, only to later learn that it is true. In the end, marriages may be strengthened after overcoming gossip but children's relationships with their parents face a greater risk of being broken.

Aside from affecting adults and children and women and men differently, these gossip stories are telling for how they contribute to the migration narrative. Transnational gossip on families is for the most part limited to stories of infidelity. This is not, I would suggest, because sex becomes more interesting during migration (although this may be part of the story). Rather, gossip stories articulate rules to the migration narrative with respect to family life. The moral message of transnational gossip is that familial obligation is the underlying goal of migration. Familial obligation is defined first and foremost as a husband's responsibility to his wife and children or, in the case of a single mother, a mother's responsibility to her children. Secondary to migrant parents' obligations to minor children, but still important, is migrant parents' responsibility to

provide for their own parents. Moreover, during periods of separation due to migration, individual freedom and happiness must take a backseat to the overall economic goal of the family migration strategy. Despite the personal benefits U.S. migration may bring, migration is supposed to be about sacrifice for the benefit of others.

Clearly, the expectation of familial obligation is difficult to achieve due to the tensions that accompany family separation. In this sense, transnational gossip serves a further role. Not only does it remind family members of their obligations toward each other, but it also is a means for providing transnational family members with information about the changes in each other's lives that that may be emotionally difficult to disclose directly. Parents often were reluctant to tell children about their marital difficulties post-migration. For example, recall how ashamed Armando was to tell his children that their mother left him. For over six months, Armando gave his children positive reports about their mother, or claimed that she simply could not come to the phone or was at work when he called. Eventually, he divulged the information to his oldest son, assuming that the boy would tell his younger siblings. To Armando's relief, he did not need to provide a long explanation, as his son cut his father short saying that he already knew from his friends at school.

While it may seem harsh for parents to keep their children out of the loop, parents may want to protect their children until they are sure that changes are permanent. Armando, for example, often fought with his wife in the first few months after she left. He said she would show up with her boyfriend at places he frequented to purposively provoke him. Armando did not want to involve his children in these problems and waited until the heat of the break up had subsided. Similarly, Sylvia and Daniel both told me that

they stopped living together well before their children knew of it. They did not tell their children in Mexico because their relationship was somewhat up in the air; at times they thought they might be able to reconcile their differences. Thus we can see that information sharing through transnational networds may also serve as an indirect means of informing children that something may not be right in their parents' relationship during a period of uncertainly. If all is resolved, parents can simply tell their children that what they heard was just gossip. If the marriage dissolves, the shock is preempted by transnational gossip.

TRANSNATIONAL GOSSIP AS SOCIAL CAPITAL

While gossip per se has not received much direct attention in research on migration and transnational communities, social networks and the social capital they offer migrants have been extensively studied.. Research suggests that social networks are a form of social capital that crucially affects immigrants' experiences and opportunities once in the United States as well as their decisions to leave home in the first place (Cohen 2004: Cerrutti and Massey 2001; Kandel and Massey 2002). In evaluating gossip it is necessary to consider a more precise definition of social capital, the alleged wealth of social networks. According to Bourdieu (1992), "Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 119). Moreover, says Coleman (1988), "the conception of social capital as a resource for action is one way of introducing social structure into the rational action paradigm" (p. 95). In other words, social capital is the product of transnational

social ties that simultaneously provides individuals with the means to fulfill their interests and constrains their activities by the nature of the resources it provides.

What does this have to do with transnational gossip? By virtue of participating in–or being subject to–transnational gossip, I suggest that individual members of Mexican transnational families have access to social capital which allows some of their personal needs to be fulfilled through migration. Either by spreading or becoming the subject of transnational gossip, community members identify themselves with a community and thus can activate the social networks that are necessary during migration. At the same time, transnational family members are constrained by transnational gossip that consistently reminds them of their obligations to families at home. Gossip stories establish a set of norms that accompany the migration narrative. Given the high levels of uncertainly during migration, gossip stories reinforce gender role expectations and the centrality of children to Mexican families by reminding transnational family members of their familial obligations. In fact, some research suggests that Mexican migrants who live with their neighbors actually send more home in remittances (Mooney 2004). In this sense, transnational gossip is a form of social control that helps transnational families remain united when their members experience tensions while they are physically apart.

Transnational gossip may be considered a form of social capital for families when it exerts influence on migrant parents to continue to provide for their children in Mexico despite the pressures they experience over time in the United States. Fathers, as previously described, are supposed to send money home to their children. Mothers are encouraged to maintain emotional ties to children despite economic difficulties in the United States. When relationships with other adults threaten to pull a marriage apart,

transnational gossip reminds couples that they have responsibilities to their families, and above all to their children. In essence, transnational gossip helps support the notion of the Mexican family as a child-centered entity. Support comes in a roundabout way, but it must be considered support nonetheless. Certainly, transnational gossip is a volatile means towards such resolution of the uncertainties of family separation for it can backfire. Yet given the ambiguity inherent in migration, transnational gossip often provides the temporary glue to keep families together at least provisionally.

The Dark Side of Gossip

According to Putman (2000:351), social capital has a dark side: it has the potential to restrict individual autonomy and decrease tolerance for difference (see also Newman et al. 2004). Clearly gossip for transnational families has an extremely dark side. If some marriages remain united in spite of community gossip (or because of it), gossip does in fact split some couples apart. However, in all the cases in which transnational gossip contributed to ending a marriage, I found that there were significant problems in the marriage before the gossip even began. For example, one of the migrant fathers I interviewed decided to leave his wife when he learned she was cheating on him; he was an alcoholic. In another case, a migrant mother lost her husband to community gossip about her sexual liaisons on a return visit to San Angel, yet this couple had been separated once before shortly after the birth of their first daughter and were only reunited when the migrant mother went to look for her husband in the United States. Nevertheless, because of the community pressures, some couples may feel that they cannot uphold their individual reputations by staying together. It is also important to note that while gossip may help migrant parents diffuse conflict with children over changes in their lives post-

migration, children are clearly hurt when they hear negative things about their parents from other sources.

The darkest aspect of transnational gossip is that there is little tolerance for women who transgress the community norms of motherhood. Indeed, town gossip anecdotes that I have described show clearly that the moral burden for upholding the family in transnational communities is almost always assigned to women (see also Alicea 1997; Aranda 2007). Recall, for example, that when the nurse in San Angel told me that her husband cheated on her and married another woman in the United States, her wrath was directed more at the migrant woman for getting involved with a married man than with her ex-husband. She, like many, blamed another woman for interfering.

Doña Laura explained why the moral burden of family lies on the shoulders of women and not men. Doña Laura, whose own husband Enrique left her for years in San Angel before she joined him in the United States, criticized many women in San Angel for cheating on their husbands while their husbands are away.

> Women should take care of themselves, not for their husbands, but for their dignity as women and for their children. Men can be unfaithful in the United States but this doesn't affect the children because they don't see it. But when the mother is unfaithful in the town, the children find out. Unfortunately, it weighs more heavily because the children live with her. One has to be very careful because it is very hard for children to accept their mother's infidelity. For them, the mother is sacred. It is much more difficult for the children to forget what a mother does.

Doña Laura articulated the general community consensus that motherhood is paramount and a mother's responsibility to her children should come above her personal interests. As I have suggested, concepts of the duties and responsibilities of motherhood and fatherhood are not necessarily revolutionized post-migration.

Indeed, interviews with children left behind show that since migrant mothers cannot always fulfill the norms of motherhood in the transnational context, children's expectations of mothers are often disappointed. This is particularly true when they learn about parents' infidelities through *chismes*; any aberration by their mother appears to hurt more than infidelities of their father who are given some sexual leeway as long as they continue to send money home. Children felt most deceived by mother's affections for other men. In short, women, not men, are the culprits when it comes to transgressions of the norms as voiced through transnational gossip. The burden of motherhood is distinctly different, and inherently harder to uphold during international migration, than that of fatherhood.

Shaping the Migrant Family Narrative

In the previous chapter I suggested that caregivers' roles as middlewomen in Mexican transnational families contribute to the idealization of the family as fundamentally based on parent-child reciprocities. This chapter suggests that neighbors, albeit in a roundabout way through their gossip, operate in a similar fashion. As a form of social capital, neighbors' gossip is part of what binds groups, and families, when they are physically separated. Whether for entertainment, information sharing, social control, solidarity with the homeland, or the diffusion of conflict within families, transnational

gossip is an important aspect of the transnational experience. As a form of social capital, gossip ultimately unites Mexican transnational families by articulating a common set of values and norms and, above all else, ensuring that migrants' responsibilities to their families–defined as mothers' and fathers' sacrifices for the benefit of their children–are respected despite the physical separation of individual family members. Gossip activates the rules of the migration narrative, calling on conservative definitions of the Mexican family in the face of drastic changes that can potentially erode these relationships.

As such, and like other forms of social capital, gossip can have what might be considered negative influence on individuals in transnational families. Specifically, by lauding a conservative vision of the Mexican family, transnational gossip tends to blame women for the relatively common and perhaps unavoidable risks to familial relationships that result from tensions during migration. As has been seen throughout this dissertation, as a result, migrant mothers' relationships with their children left behind suffer disproportionably.

Chapter 11

FAMILY STRETCH

By mid-February of 2005 I was getting tired of living in San Angel. I had gotten used to the cowboy hats and the *ranchera* music, but longed for my friendships back in the states. In addition, I was at an extremely productive moment in my research, interviewing one to two families daily, which often left me feeling sad about all the troubles families reported due to international migration. Ironically, it was a time when town life had actually picked up. Since the New Year, there had been parties nearly every weekend. Many couples planned their weddings for this time of the year, which were town-wide events that anyone could go to. However, as a 28-year-old mother of a toddler, I didn't feel that I could join in this scene on my own. Town social events were mostly for teenage girls, young men and their chaperones. Without a family connection, it was not proper for me to attend. Frankly, I was growing lonely.

When the *feria*, or party for the town's patron saint, rolled around, I was determined to attend one of the town-wide dances to shake up my daily routine. On the night of the big dance at the town plaza just a block from the house where I lived, at about 10:30 I wandered down the street to check out the music; in those parts it was always a live band. I watched for a bit with Temo, who ran wildly around me, dancing to the music and eliciting smiles from those who passed. When I grew bored, I headed back to the house and was relieved when I ran into one of the couples I liked most in San Angel.

I first met Angelo in the United States, but had not known him that well as we only met a few times. His wife Gabriela was one of the nicest people I knew in town. She is well educated and extremely friendly and we got along well despite the 15-year age difference between us. Before Angelo came home at Christmas time, Gabriela and I took my son and her four children, ranging from 6 to 11, on outings to the river a few times. After Angelo returned, he took on the role of host on occasion, showing me around town. The three of us had been to the New Year's dance together, and that night we agreed to go to the party.

A few hours later, Temo was asleep back at the house, and Gabriela, Angelo, Angelo's adult niece, her aunt visiting from Mexico City, and I were finishing up a bottle of tequila at the dance. At 3 AM the band stopped to go home and Angelo invited us to his house to continue the festivities. At that point we were joined by one of his teenage nephews who attended university in the nearby city and was home for the *feria*. We sat in their living room listening and dancing to *merengue* and *bachata* songs typical among Latino crowds in the United States but almost foreign to San Angel.

The informal party was interrupted shortly thereafter by some commotion outside. Two drunken men were upset because a car had blocked their truck and they weren't able to get out. Gabriela had gone to the door and was trying to explain to them that it wasn't their car and there was nothing they could do about it. Angelo got up and joined her, speaking more forcefully. I wasn't paying attention to the conversation and was off in my own little world until Gabriela's loud voice, now directed at her husband inside the house, called me back. "Don't be so stupid," she spit out, "You are not going to start a fight over something like this. You don't live here, I do, and I don't want problems." To

this, Angelo erupted saying, “A woman doesn’t tell me what to do in my own house.” And before I had fully figured out what was going on, he took a swing at her at the door in front of us all. Gabriela proceeded to run from him through the living room and into another room; Angelo followed and hit her once again.

Gabriela wailed. The other family members followed and separated the couple. I sat in a stupor, shocked at the ugly face of violence and how it had caught me unawares. Then a small figure emerged from the bedroom, rubbing his eyes to see what had happened. In an instant I was on my feet and took the 11-year-old boy–Angelo and Gabriela’s oldest son–back to the bedroom. I sat with the younger boy in the dark, not knowing what else to do, murmuring things like he shouldn’t worry about it, it wasn’t his problem. After the voices outside seemed more subdued, I asked if he wanted to see his mother. The boy shook his head no. Me neither, I thought to myself, and I stayed where I was letting the tide roll over.

During the next hour I eventually emerged from the room and spoke to both Gabriela, who was being pampered by the female relatives in one room, and Angelo, calming down with a beer and his nephew in the other room. I alternately returned to the bedroom to check on the children. Fortunately, the couple’s three other children slept through the whole incident. However, I found the older boy crying under his covers and I sat with him until he calmed down enough to pretend to be asleep.

It was a tight spot for me, as I was out of place in this family affair. Part of me was ashamed for not running to defend Gabriela; I was afraid that doing so would estrange me from Angelo. Given prior experience in getting involved in domestic disputes with Mexican couples in the United States, I suspected that the couple would

work things out in a few days. It seemed that Gabriela was getting sufficient support from the female relatives, although one of them who had endured years of abuse from her ex-husband was advising Gabriela that she should not have provoked her husband while he was drinking. When I spoke to Gabriela all I did was give her a supportive hug. She dabbed her eyes and with a nasty resolve told me this wasn't the first time he had picked a fight and left her with problems. "*Nunca le voy a perdonar* (I will never forgive him)." When I apologized for getting us into this situation and for being so eager to stay out with them at the dance, Gabriela shook her head and replied bitterly, "*Nadie tiene la culpa menos él* (no one is at fault but him)."

I spent more time talking to Angelo, recognizing his place as the head of the family and my selfish need to ultimately remain on good terms with him. I said that he shouldn't worry and that I would forget about the whole incident for my book. But Angelo disagreed vehemently.

> *Pero, y lo puedes escribir en tu libro, que yo – si sea lo correcto o no – no acepto que mi mujer intervenga en mi casa. Yo trato de ser un poco educado, y realmente soy un hombre tranquilo. Todos te pueden decir eso, son raras veces que me altero asi. Y sé que soy siendo el tipico hombre machista. Pero, simplemente es mi casa, y soy yo en frente, y no acepto que mi mujer intervenga en eses asuntos.*
>
> But, and you can write this in your book, that I–if right or not–will not accept that my woman intervene in my house. I try to be a little educated, and really I am a

> pretty tranquil man. Everyone can tell you this. It is rare that I get agitated like this. And I know I am being the typical *machista* man. But, it is simple, this is my house and I am at its head and I do not accept that my woman intervene in these affairs.

I was immediately impressed by the weight of the situation. It was a moment when I saw first hand the profound impact migration has on negotiations between husbands and wives. When Angelo became belligerent with the men bothering his family, Gabriela–who lived alone with her children most of the year–got upset knowing that he was potentially creating problems for her with the neighbors that she would have to deal with after Angelo left. And Angelo, aware that his attitudes were slightly old fashioned because he lived most of the year in a country where gender relationships were more egalitarian but also where he worked as kitchen help subordinate to others, felt he could not accept that during his return home, his place as the head of his family would be undermined by his wife.

Eventually, I left with Gabriela's "*nunca le voy a perdonar*" and Angelo's "*en mi casa no permito a mi mujer*" pounding in my head. Being back at the house at 5 AM, the silence of my room broken only by Temo's peaceful breathing, felt like a cure. I hugged him tightly and went to sleep.

The next few days were uncomfortable. I knew it wasn't my place to visit Gabriela, although I wanted to know how she was. I heard that her face was a little sore, but that she wasn't physically injured from the outburst. In the aftermath, hardest for me was the breach of confidence with Angelo and Gabriela's 11-year-old son, who I had witnessed in a moment of crisis crying in his bed. I saw him out milling around the fair

grounds the next two days; he avoided me and I followed suit. I was embarrassed knowing that I had embarrassed him.

On day three, the aunt from Mexico City who had been there the night of the fight invited me on an outing to the river. While we were talking about this, one of Gabriela and Angelo's sons (asleep during the night of the dance) who was out on the street and listening to us announced that they were going to go to the river also. Over the next 20 minutes, he arranged it so that we all would go together.

I wasn't sure how to act, but Gabriela led the way and was all smiles when she emerged from the house instructing her children to get ready with her usual sighs of exasperation at the mechanics of having to manage the four boys. The couple had clearly made up, and Angelo joined us shortly thereafter. We all walked down to the river talking happily about mundane affairs as if the night of the fight had never happened.

But the fight had happened and was imprinted in my mind. Thus the fact that we could enjoy the excursion to the river so much that day together was a powerful experience of reconciliation. Angelo and Gabriela's four children jumped all over their father in the water. I played water volleyball with the oldest, feeling the tension between us immediately dissolve. Gabriela and Angelo laughed and played Frisbee together. I was impressed watching how much the couple truly enjoyed each other's company.

As I mulled over my experiences later that evening and the following day, I decided that in moments like these lay the hope that had been eluding me thus far in my research, which had often left me disheartened by stories of separation. A light bulb suddenly turned on in my head: despite family problems, wicked fights and childhood fears at seeing their parents exposed, families can provide love, laughter, good times and

happy memories for each other. In the end, perhaps, the Mexican families I studied were more resilient than the tensions they experienced suggested.

+ + + + +

I started the dissertation describing a puzzle in evaluating existing evidence on the experiences of Mexican transnational families. On the one hand, family members may face great hardship due to tensions caused by separation, resulting in episodes like the one I had witnessed between Angelo and Gabriela. On the other hand, migration may solidify ties between family members as migration involves a dense set of social networks arising out of mutual obligation. Does migration divide or unite families?

In the preceding chapters I have provided evidence for both scenarios. Analysis of the sources of tension for Mexican transnational families shows the following:

1) Mexican mothers are migrating without their children due to a combination of opportunities and constraints manifest at the structural level, particularly as shaped by patterns of undocumented migration, and at the personal level. In doing so, they join the migration of men to seek economic mobility but also challenge the cultural constructs of the Mexican family.

2) Transnational mothers are expected to be caregivers and transnational fathers are expected to be providers. These expectations are often

difficult for both men and women to achieve and thus cause stress on the relationships parents have with children left behind.

3) Children also have a difficult time fulfilling the expectations parents have of them during periods of separation, which creates tension with parents that varies according children's changing needs over time.

4) Reciprocity with caregivers differs with grandparents and other relatives. With relatives, financial disputes are common and the arrangement is short lived. Children may live with grandparents for longer periods of time, but tensions may arise over children's loyalties and over grandparents' declining physical health.

5) Gossip causes problems for martial relationships, which may affect parents' relationships with their children post-migration.

Yet Mexican transnational families are not necessarily disorganized by the tensions they experience. Instead, my data suggest that:

1) Mexican mothers leave different types of families behind for different reasons than Mexican fathers, informed by cultural scripts of Mexican families. In turn, mothers' and fathers' relationships with children left behind are fundamentally different.

2) Transnational parents' expectations of themselves (either as caregivers or providers) help them strive to fulfill their obligations to their children and be reunited with them. Mothers generally are separated from their children for relatively short periods of time; fathers may be separated for a longer duration, but they continue to consider themselves as the head of the migrant household as long as they send money home.

3) Parents' responsiveness to the tensions in their children's lives during periods of separation affords children the ability to express diverging interests and stake claims to the family's resources to a greater degree than might otherwise be possible.

4) Caregivers in Mexico do not replace migrant parents. The roles they assume reinforce parental obligation to children.

5) The underlying message of transnational gossip is that parents' chief goal when they migrate should not be personal fulfillment, but the fulfillment of their obligations to their children in Mexico.

When parents and children live apart due to international migration, their relationships suffer but simultaneously are reinforced by the ways families manage separation. In the remainder of this chapter, I explain why this is so. First I show that

despite fears of family disintegration, parents and children tend to continue to feel obligated to each other even when the expectations they have for each other go unmet. Next I offer an explanation as to why families stick together. I suggest that in the context of labor migration, family members negotiate parent-child relationships by emphasizing the migration narrative I described in Chapter 2 and the conservative cultural constructs of Mexican families it involves. As such, the tensions families experience often act as centripetal forces, pulling families members back together despite, and at times because of, the hardship these tensions cause.

FAMILY DISINTEGRATION

> *La consecuencia más grande de este dicho–el sueño americano–es la desintegración familiar.*
>
> The greatest consequence of the so-called "American Dream" is the disintegration of the family.
>
> – 30-year-old Eric whose father Enrique migrated while he was a teenager

This comment is something I heard again and again, albeit in different versions, from some of the family members I interviewed, teachers and school administrators and Mexican community activists. For example, one front-page headline in the Mexican newspaper *El Sol de Tehuacan* declared: "Family disintegration is of concern: owing largely to out-migration in the region." An interview with an official from child

protective services reveals the prevalent attitude about the effect of migration on the family.

> The consequences of family disintegration are serious, severe, "because from the moment that there is a migrant father or migrant mother, the family is disintegrated. Do you know how fragile a child who doesn't have a father in the home is? There are cases in which the father leaves and maybe he sends economic resources, but in many cases he leaves and the family doesn't hear from him again, the family is left homeless." (Amayo 2005)

Migration is seen as the cause of many of the problems that youth in Mexican communities face.

This dissertation points out some of the reasons for such alarm. In prior chapters I have described the emotional consequences of family separation. I have shown that mothers and fathers agonize over making the difficult decision to leave their children behind. I have reported how grandparents love their grandchildren greatly and want to care for them, but struggle financially to look after them and, more importantly perhaps, fear that over time the physical incapacities of old age will prevent them from adequately caring for their grandchildren. I have underscored the ways that transnational gossip can cause problems for family members who live apart. Mostly, I have highlighted the stories of Mexican children left behind who poignantly feel the absence of their migrant parents. Can we not describe these hardships as dividing families and causing intergenerational

relationships in Mexican family to disintegrate? Three findings point to the durability of intergenerational obligation given such tensions.

Parental Obligation

Parents' feelings of obligation to their children did not diminish during periods of family separation. Nor did they wane as their children grew older. Transnational parents were extremely sensitive to evaluations of their ability to care for children of all ages from a distance. Often they were reluctant to discuss the children they left behind in Mexico. Their descriptions of parenting from a distance were framed by the gendered expectations of parenthood they had for themselves.

Fathers judged themselves on their abilities to fulfill financial obligations to their children. Some fathers described feeling guilty about not being there for their children, and drinking appeared to be one way of submerging this guilt. A previously mentioned father who went on a four-day drinking binge and then said, fuck it, and returned to his wife and children in Mexico is a case in point. Other fathers described their communication with children as being directly related to their ability to send money home; they called frequently and regularly only when they had a PIN number for a money order. The fathers who spoke most openly with me about their experiences were those–like Armando Lopez–who had divorced their children's mother in the United States. These fathers constantly highlighted the ways they provided and cared for their children, filling what they deemed to be a gap left by their ex-wives. All the fathers I met considered themselves to be obligated to wives and children in Mexico, regardless of extramarital affairs and other obligations to women and children in the United States, as long as they were the principal male provider for their families in Mexico.

In some ways, Mexican fathers resemble fathers in the United States in that "men stay connected to children and grandchildren through their ties to women" (Bianchi 2006:812). Transnational fathers who became estranged from children in Mexico uniformly had experienced a significant rupture with their children's mother. Yet, I would suggest that for transnational fathers, connection to children is primarily achieved via remittances. The few fathers I interviewed whose children lived with an ex-wife in Mexico all continued to stake claim to their children as fathers when they sent remittances home. This contrasts starkly with Hertz's (2005) observation that when U.S. women choose single motherhood with men they know, the children's biological fathers are not expected to be financial providers and instead their emotional connections to children are emphasized; fatherly obligations are not necessarily fixed, and may be expressed in different ways in different contexts. Mexican fathers during labor migration feel that obligations to their children are primarily financial ones.

Mexican mothers are increasingly on the move and joining men as labor migrants to the United States, but mothers feel that their obligations to their children are fundamentally different. Financial support from mothers may be important, particularly for single mothers, but it is not definitive as it is for fathers. Mothers said they felt instead that their emotional support as caregivers for their children was paramount. This was often very difficult for mothers to achieve from a distance. For this reason many mothers felt extremely guiltily about having left their children behind. Mothers, for example, described crying regularly and experiencing bouts of depression upon arrival in the United States. Even though mothers migrate, like men, to work, they seem unable to redefine their obligations to children in financial terms. In the context of Mexican labor

migration, mothers suffer greatly because they cannot fulfill their caregiving obligations to their children.

Mothers are not the only ones who do not redefine the obligations of motherhood during migration. Children, caregivers, and the broader Mexican community in general continue to hold transnational mothers to expectations based on their caregiving role for children. Fathers, in contrast, are expected by all to be financial providers. Moreover, mothers often are judged more harshly for the same activities as transnational fathers. A gendered double standard marks parental obligations. The moral burden of family separation often rests on transnational mothers.

Parents' responsiveness to children suggests that their feelings of parental obligation are durable despite the difficulties parents have in meeting these obligations. Research with a number of families over time shows that both mothers and fathers made significant efforts to adapt to their children's changing needs. This was not always easy. At times parents suppressed their own desires to be reunited with their children as they deemed it better for their children to remain with caregivers in Mexico. The case of Ofelia Cruz and her son German is a prime example. Ofelia wanted to bring German to the United States, but given his resistance to the idea, she allowed him to stay with his grandmother in Mexico. As if in compensation, Ofelia and her husband made efforts to show their love for German by buying him a new computer and paying for a large party for his communion. German, of course, may have interpreted their actions differently, but his parents clearly sought to fulfill German's wishes to the best of their ability given the resources available to them.

Parents also changed their goals for the family to meet their children's changing needs. This was true for Paula Rodriguez whose one desire was to provide her children with the educational opportunity she never had and thus also enable her to retire to Mexico when her children, then working as professionals, would be able to support her through old age. Paula's plans radically changed when Mateo left college to migrate to work in the United States and Cindy dropped out of school to move in with her boyfriend. Regardless of these disappointments, Paula attempted to be responsive to her children. She financially supported Mateo when he came to New Jersey and vowed always to maintain her communication with Cindy.

The transnational parents I met did not disown or sever relationships with their children who did not fulfill their expectations. They expressed disappointment, but did not stop attempting to provide or care for their children because of unmet expectations. Nor did parents generally give up on themselves in the face of difficulties they had in meeting expectations of mothering and fathering from a distance. In some families, parents did diminish ties to their children in Mexico. For mothers, this generally followed a divorce with the children's father. For fathers, gaps in contact were often related to bouts of unemployment. Yet for the most part, migrant parents reestablished contact with their children and attempted to reinsert themselves in their children's lives when the difficulties they were experiencing had subsided.

Children's Definitions of the Family

Children left behind are much more upset by the unmet expectations they have of their parents (see also Smith 2006). If parents continue to feel responsible for children whatever hardships they experience–and whatever the children's behavior–children seem

to experience greater disappointment. As a result, do they subsequently "give up" on their parents? As Chapter 6 indicates, young children act resentfully towards their parents for leaving them, while teenagers have a number of difficulties in fulfilling parental expectations in terms of behavior and school performance. It is possible that older children do not come to better understand their parents' choices as they come of age, but rather they suppress their feelings of anger toward migrant parents when they realize that they need to take advantage of their parents' resources to migrate themselves.

Were children to give up on their parents, I suspect that they might redefine their families as only consisting of those who they felt cared for them. They would act like Armando's youngest daughter Lupe who said she was going to take her grandmother's last name. Yet this is an unusual case, linked to special circumstances–in this instance Armando's return to his children in Mexico and his remarriage. Virtually all children left behind continue to describe their migrant parents as significant figures in their families and their lives despite the disappointment they might have felt at their parents' absences. They do not generally redefine their families.

The continued significance of mothers and fathers for children during periods of migration is highlighted in the pictures 423 Mexican school students in the first through sixth grades drew of their families. Although I gave general instructions–"draw a picture of your family"–70 percent of the children in transnational families drew both parents, despite the fact that none lived with both parents in Mexico and in many cases migrant parents had divorced or separated post migration. Almost the same proportion of children living with both parents in Mexico–79 percent–also drew both parents in their family pictures. However, only 43 percent of children living without one or both parents due to a

divorce or separation in Mexico drew both their parents. Thus, while divorce or marital separation within Mexico may alter children's perceptions of the family norm, the international migration of parents per se appears not to, regardless of the problems between marital partners post-migration. Physical distance due to migration ironically allows the concept of the family, defined as stemming first and foremost from the relationships between parents and children, to live on in the minds of children left behind by migrant parents, even if on a day-to-day basis, mothers, fathers and children do not live together.

Also telling about Mexican children's feelings about the roles of mothers and fathers during migration are older students' answers to the following question in the survey I distributed at regional schools: "Do you think it is better for children that their mother or father migrates to the US and why?" In San Angel, of 162 middle school students, 7 percent said it is alright for either parent to migrate, stating that this way they can send money home and help their children study more. Only 2 percent of students said the mother should migrate because she is more responsible. Thirty percent responded that neither parent should leave because children need both parents. The majority, 47 percent, said that it is better for the father to migrate. Of these, 35 percent cited qualities of fathers, including that they are physically stronger and that it is their role to work and maintain the family. Most (46 percent) wrote that the relationship between mother and children is more important. According to one 14-year-old girl:

> The dad, because the father doesn't know how to give advice to his child. He doesn't really know what his child likes. He doesn't know how to understand him.

> But the mother can give the love of both the father and the mother. {Note: I'd omit the "or her" because the child's meaning is clear.]

Male students agreed. One 17-year-old wrote, "Because the mother is the coolest" and a 14-year-old boy explained, "Because if the mom left the father wouldn't be able to replace a mother's care." Another 14-year-old male student wrote "Because the father doesn't understand them [children] like the mother." Students described mothers' role in the family as more central and intimately tied to the care of children. In contrast, students considered that fathers were more suited to migration due to their obligation to provide for children economically. In essence, facing a scenario of family disruption due to migration, students–regardless of the family's migration history–responded by replicating the cultural constructs of mothers as caregivers and fathers as providers.

Reunification

A third crucial factor that suggests the durability of intergenerational relationships is the high prevalence of family reunification. Among the 12 family constellations I studied, only half remain apart. I am not able to calculate reunification rates across my entire sample, as my ability to follow up on all the families I interviewed in San Angel and New Jersey has been limited. Yet family reunification, albeit sometimes temporary, was a recurring experience for the families I met. While in San Angel, for example, 11 of the children I interviewed were either temporarily or permanently reunited with their parents in Mexico. I know of an additional three children I interviewed who have since joined their parents in the United States.

In New Jersey, I also have also witnessed a number of family reunifications. Of the 22 mothers I interviewed, at least nine have been reunited with some or all of their children. Reunification among fathers appears to be less common, yet I know that four fathers I interviewed had older children join them in the United States. This pattern is particularly interesting given that these older children often joined fathers who they had spent little time with as children and did not know very well.

Reunification does not necessarily end the difficulties in families. Research focusing on immigrant adaptation in the United States suggests that parent-child relationships are a source of conflict post reunification (Artico 2003; Mitrani, Santisteban, and Muir 2004; Smith, Lalonde, and Johnson 2004; Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie 2000). Expectations during reunification may continue to be unmet for children, who imagine life in the United States to be affluent and secure, as well as parents, who expect children's difficulties to dissolve now that separation is over (Artico 2003; Mitrani, Santisteban and Muir 2004).

Clearly better quantitative data is needed to shed light on patterns of family reunification. Data on the timing of reunification would be particularly important, as children's experiences of parental absence, I have shown, may vary between preadolescence, early adolescence and late adolescence. My own study suggests that family separations are quite fluid. Separations are often temporary, particularly for migrant mothers and their children. Separations are frequently of longer duration for fathers, but fathers may visit their children more often than mothers. My analysis also suggests that unmet expectations and hardships during periods of separation do not generally lead to the disintegration of the family, despite the difficulties separation

causes. Instead, ties between parents and children in Mexican transnational families appear to be a remarkable resilient.

Sampling and Design

Admittedly, it is possible that this study's research design, with a particular focus on families with ties to children left in Mexico, provides a rosier picture of family separation than may actually exist. I have certainly heard second hand a number of horror stories about children's experiences (see also Nazario 2006). Recently, a friend who works in the New Brunswick public schools told me one such story about a 10-year-old student who had previously lived with her grandmother in Mexico, who was "crazy in the head. You see," she told my friend over lunch, "something was wrong with her and one day she killed herself." Apparently the young girl stayed with the grandmother because her mother, living in New Brunswick, had a new boyfriend would not accept the young girl who was the product of a previous affair. At some point, the grandmother purposively ingested some sort of poison and died. The girl's mother sent for her, but instead of coming to New Brunswick, she went to live with an uncle in North Carolina for a time. The young student was only reunited with her mother in New Brunswick after the boyfriend, who objected to her, was stabbed to death, a killing (which I read about in the local newspaper) that local gossip said was a result of his involvement with a married woman whose husband took revenge. Although eventually ending in a reunification with her mother, this young girl had clearly experienced much in her mere 10 years of life.

It is also possible that there is some sampling bias. In other words, it might be that only the most dedicated parents were willing to tell me about the children they left behind, and thus my research naturally excluded cases like that described above.

However, I did interview a number of parents with unpleasant stories. I interviewed three fathers who were openly alcoholics and or abused drugs. I interviewed many fathers who told me of their extramarital affairs. I interviewed mothers who had cheated on migrant husbands while in Mexico and those who left their husbands for other men once they arrived in the United States. One mother I interviewed left her children and did not talk to them for three years while she worked at a New Brunswick bar notorious as a site of prostitution, only to return for the boys and take them from her ex-husband without his prior knowledge. I also ran into some rare cases in Mexico in which children were truly abused or neglected while their parents were away. This includes the case of Eric, Edwin and Orlando cited in a number of chapters, and Nico, who lived with his aging grandmother in a filthy house and whose only brother had returned from the United States to escape criminal charges for robbery.

Regardless of these problems, interviews with family members indicated that even alcoholic and womanizing fathers cared dearly about their children and families in Mexico. In most cases, they sent money home as often as they could. Likewise, mothers whom might be described as abandoning their children for other men in their lives rarely forgot about their children. Instead they agonized over communicating with their children and in most cases, continued to call them frequently, even if by community standards for motherhood this was not enough.

More systematic data on the stability of family relationships is clearly required. Yet after interviews with over 100 families in two communities, I believe that although sensational cases exist, they are not the norm. In the end, most of the mothers and fathers I interviewed–like the families I met in Mexico–did not live disorganized lives despite

the personal problems they may have encountered. Rather their lives were rather ordered, whether from the demands of work in the United States or the demands of raising a family in Mexico.. Indeed, in the end, despite the pain and discomfort I heard about, in very few families I met did mothers or fathers actually "abandon" their children, defined as losing contact with them completely. In most cases, despite the great pressure distance exerts on relationships between husbands and wives, mothers and fathers and their children, Mexican families appear for the most part to stick together.

FAMILY STRETCH

Why do families stay together given the hardships they experience? One possible explanation is that Mexican family values are so strong that transnational families are able to resist the forces that risk their undoing during migration. While there may be an element of truth in this explanation, it is inadequate because it cannot explain families' difficulties in negotiating relationships during periods of separation. As I have repeatedly emphasized, the parents and children I interviewed struggled with their relationships and they did not appear to automatically accept cultural constructs of gender and the family. This is consistent with scholarship that shows Mexican women and men negotiate gender roles to varying degrees in their relationships with each other during migration (Hirsch 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Parrado and Flippen 2005; Pribilsky 2004; Smith 2006). Relationships between couples may change according to the context in which they are enacted. So too relationships between parents and children are under negotiation. After all, pictures drawn by elementary schools students show that children living in single

parent households in Mexico may imagine different types of kinship ties based on their living arrangements.

Some scholars have suggested that instead of automatically adopting cultural norms and values, family members "do family", or actively construct kinship ties similar to the ways that men and women "do gender," in their everyday interactions (Bianchi 2006; Cherlin 2006; Nelson 2006; West and Zimmerman 1987; Weston 1991). According to Nelson (2006), "doing families involves the process of assigning rights, privileges, and responsibilities within the web of relationships of those we call 'family'", and that when we "do family", "we decide who counts as family and we assign to those who do count what we consider appropriate behaviors, tasks, and obligations" (p. 783). Although this perspective emphasizes individuals' agency, it does not discount the powerful influence cultural constructs have on shaping who individuals include or exclude from their families and the meanings they ascribe to family relationships.

Research shows that context is crucial to determining how family members "do family", that is how they assign family responsibilities and obligations. For example, young mothers in urban areas of the United States may decide to have children before marriage because they want children while young and the men available to be fathers do not conform to their expectations of husbands and fathers (Edin and Kefalas 2005). Women who choose single motherhood also may feel that they cannot find suitable men in time to father their children, and may consequently differ in the expectations they have of their children's biological fathers as opposed to men who become social fathers for their children at a later date (Hertz 2006). And, white single mothers in rural areas might

establish boundaries with their own mothers who help with child care in order to keep a place open for social fathers for their children in the future (Nelson 2006).

I suggest that considering the ways family members "do family" when parents and children live apart explains the durability of intergenerational obligations in Mexican transnational families. Mexican families manage such separations by assigning very few parental responsibilities to substitute caregivers, almost always grandparents. Despite physical separation, parental rights and responsibilities to children are emphasized because labor migration intensifies parental obligations towards children and the pressure on children to "make good" of parental sacrifice. Although some personal benefits may be gained by migration, such as escaping a difficult marital relationship, all Mexican transnational parents I met rationalized separation from their children as a means for better providing for them. All children understood this and told me that their parents left for the United States to work. Caregivers in Mexico who facilitated the labor migration of parents said they did so in order to help parents fulfill their obligations to their children. The gossip of neighbors frowned upon any personal pleasures parents experienced during migration. In short, Mexican transnational families and their neighbors consider parent-child separation to be a necessary sacrifice to make labor migration possible.

Members of transnational families respond to pressures in their relationships by "doing gender" and "doing family" in line with many of the conservative cultural constructs of Mexican familism. In the face of tensions that could potentially pull family members apart, members of Mexican transnational families and their neighbors reaffirm that children's needs are central to parents' migration. They assess migrant parents' ability to successfully sacrifice themselves during migration for these children in light of

the gender roles embedded in Mexican family values. They create boundaries with extended kin–the substitute caregivers–that affirm parental rights to their children left behind. Ironically, these conservative cultural constructs are often the source of the tensions family members experience in the first place.

In short, in the transnational context and the opportunity structures it entails, the tensions Mexican families experience not only stretch families; they also lead family members to "do family", or manage their interactions, in ways that reinforce parents' and children's feelings of obligation and responsibility towards each other.

By negotiating relationships according to conservative definitions of the Mexican family, parents and children in transnational families (with the help of their neighbors) are usually able to stick together despite the hardships they experience while living apart. At the same time, "doing family" according to conservative definitions of Mexican families creates a series of difficulties for family members. Just as there are "internal and external coercive aspects of gender" (Nelson 2006:782), so too there are coercive aspects of the social construction of Mexican transnational families.

Unintended Consequences of the Family Stretch

First and foremost, the moral judgments of migrant parents tend to be severe. Salazar-Parreñas (2005) found a similar "vilification" of migrant parents–particularly of transnational mothers–in the Philippines.

> Transnational families are not the right kind of family in the Philippines . . . From the perspective of various community representatives, the more the transnational family diverges from the construction of the right kind of family–that is, the

> conventional dual wage earning nuclear family with a breadwinning father and a double day burdened mother–the more dysfunctional the family is considered. (P. 35)

> Despite its questionable basis, the media's pathological depiction of transnational families, particularly those of migrant mothers, instills in the public's consciousness the view that migration facilitates a care crisis in transnational families. The crisis supposedly results in the instability of family life and consequently the use of "drugs, gambling and drinking" among children of migrant workers. Without doubt, sensationalist reports on the well being of children in transnational families fuel the vilification of migrant mothers, whose migration is equated with the abandonment of children. (P. 40)

As is true in the Philippines, women more often than not bear most of the moral blame for the problems their families face during periods of separation. The hardships of separation are thus intensified in families in which mothers have migrated without their children. Gossip targets mothers' activities more often than fathers'. Children assess their parents' love for them using a gendered double standard. Mothers most often are the scapegoats and carry the moral burden of responsibility for parental absences.

Given the gendered expectations in Mexican families, it is perhaps not surprising that women carry a disproportionate amount of responsibility for the families' well being during periods of separation. Somewhat more surprising, given the symbolic centrality of children in Mexican families, is that of all members of the family, children left behind

experience a disproportionate amount of the family hardship. While children may be the motivation for parents' sacrifice, the emotional difficulties they have are substantial, and may bleed into school performance, eventually affecting children's future career opportunities in Mexico. While adults may experience their time away as relatively short in duration, for children, whose frame of reference for measuring time is different from that of adults, even periods of separation lasting one to two years can be monumental. Children of migrant parents are likely to describe their parents' absences as having a lasting impact on their lives, even after being reunited with them. This is in contrast to parents who generally seemed to feel that once they were back with their children, as Zalatiel remarked, "it is like everything was erased."

Additionally, children of migrant parents often feel different or unique for having been left behind. This is quite remarkable since in many of the communities I visited nearly one in four students at any given time had one or both parents working in the United States. Given the fluidity of child care arrangements, it is likely that even more children have experienced such separations from their parents. However, children left behind described virtually no support from their peers in facing the tensions they had with their parents. Schools did not provide any social support for children of migrant parents. At times the organization of schooling actually accentuated students' awareness of their parents' absences. As a result, children who are living a rather normal experience by community standards feel completely abnormal.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FAMILY STRETCH

Aside from providing insight into Mexican family life in the transnational context, this study's findings offer some theoretical contributions to our understanding of gender, children's positions in their families, and the nature of family relationships over the life course and during migration.

In terms of gender, this research shows that gender norms with parenting are quite resilient. They remain strong, even though post migration Mexican women may experience a relative increase in power vis-à-vis the men in their lives due to their greater labor force participation, and the greater gender equality in the United States. As such, when researching families it is important to disaggregate changing gender roles and expectations related to relationships between women and men from those associated with relationships with children. The negotiation of motherhood and fatherhood may vary in different contexts, particularly during the context of labor migration to the United States. In relationships with spouses, migrating women may be pioneers, but in relationships with their children they may be "reluctant revolutionaries" (Hertz 2006).

This study offers insight into sociological concerns with children's experiences of power in their families as well. Specifically, in line with the relatively new field of childhood studies, I find that children–who do not generally make migration decisions–are not necessarily voiceless in their families. Rather, analysis of their experiences after parents leave suggests that children participate in family migration trajectories, even if from a relatively powerless position in their families. When there is a disjuncture between children's symbolic role in families and their experiences as family dependents, children may be able to exert influence by calling on what Zelizer (1994) has referred to in another context as their "social worth" in the migration narrative.

Research findings from this project also make clear that experiences over the life course are crucial for assessing families' outcomes. If one were to consider, for example, the lives of children left behind at any given moment, one might conclude–as media portrayals suggest–that separation has disastrous consequences. We might trace a rather direct relationship between family separation and family disorganization. However, the methodological approach of looking ethnographically at family members' experiences over time reveals how families respond to each other's changing needs. Looking at families longitudinally reveals how families construct and negotiate their relationships, or "do family", within the socially structured opportunities available to them.

Moreover, this dissertation illustrates the processes by which members of families participate to some degree in the reification of the family as what Boudieu calls a "realized category." Bourdieu suggests that the family is a fiction, simply a word, which is brought to life as a social institution by both the state and also by individuals who are members of families. "The near perfect match that is set up between the subjective and objective categories provides the foundation for an experience of the world as self-evident, taken for granted" (Bourdieu 1996:21). Many scholars have highlighted the ways that the state and its social institutions have perpetuated particular definitions of the family, through legal codes regulating marriage and divorce, regulations of reproductive technologies and/or social service regulations for example (Gordon 1994; Kline 2001; Sanchez 1993; Yuval-Davis 1997). The ways individuals collude in the making of the family have not been examined so carefully.

My data suggests that when members of migrant families experience economic pressure that undermines the constitution of the family as they know it, they often refer

back to taken-for-granted cultural constructs of the family with which they are familiar. Fathers in Mexican transnational families move abroad because they have difficulties providing for their families at home. After they move away, they continue to define relationships with their families on the basis of their ability to provide economically for them. Mexican transnational mothers do not talk about their new roles in their families post-migration, but rather emphasize their emotional ties to children, albeit from a distance. Grandparents revel in caring for their grandchildren, but constantly remind themselves and the children in their care that biological mothers and fathers have an irreplaceable role in the family. And children evaluate mothers' absences more harshly than those of their fathers conforming, again, to the caring versus providing paradigm. The transnational family, despite being fairly flexible in response to members' negotiations of conflicting needs and interests over time, as Creed (2000) suggests, " is not a quick-response unit" (p. 344). The value migrants ascribe to the family is enduring despite conditions that can potentially pull parents and children apart. Members of Mexican transnational families–at least during labor migration–often reassert conservatively defined ties to each other.

CONCLUSIONS

Members of Mexican transnational families are, in many ways, like families without migrant members in that they actively negotiate their relationships. However, they do face distinct pressures that set them apart from families who are able to live together. And, the family stretch is painful. Angelo and Gabriela may be able to surmount

the difficulties encountered due to migration and continue to have a family they love and care about, but this does not override Gabriela's statement to her husband, "you don't live here" and Angelo's reaction, "I won't accept that my woman rules my house." It does not erase the betrayal Gabriela felt when her good-natured husband assaulted her and she said, in her wavering voice during a moment of fury, "*Nunca le voy a perdonar*" (I will never forgive you.) It does not ease the confusion their son felt at hearing his parents fight.

It would, perhaps, be easiest to conclude that situations like those Angelo and Gabriela experienced would best be avoided if gendered expectations in Mexican families were loosened thereby reducing much emotional hardship at separation. If Angelo relaxed his need to be the king of his home on return visits home, the violent incident described at the outset of this chapter might have been avoided. Likewise, if migrant mothers and other members of Mexican communities let go of their expectations of mothering, children and migrant mothers would not suffer so acutely at separation. But, urging members of Mexican transnational families to embrace freedom and let go of their family ties is suggesting that families disadvantaged by the global economy should simply learn to live apart. It could be argued that this type of remedy would be most beneficial to business owners who operate in the global economy; if individuals feel less tied to their families, or aleter the way they define families in response to changing needs of the global labor market, able-bodied workers would be more readily available to fill low-wage jobs in industrialized nations.

Such an outcome would embody what I consider to be one of the most perverse forms of inequality: controlling how others choose to live and the families they wish to

have. Surely if women want to give up aspects of mothering for work, we can support them in these efforts. But none of the family members I interviewed, despite the personal benefits they acquired during migration, wanted to live apart. Migrant Mexican mothers want to live with and care for their children. Migrant Mexican fathers want to live with their families and be able to provide for them. Grandparents want their grandchildren to have loving relationships with parents. And children, above all else, want to be with their parents. As long as families want to live together, we cannot simply suggest that they get on with their lives in the name of individual freedom or of responding to the needs of global business.

Given the pain family members experience with parent-child separation, I suggest that efforts to support Mexican transnational families should be focused in two directions (See Appendix B for specifics). First, there are concrete ways that Mexican transnational families can reduce some of the conflicts that arise due to international migration by learning about the collective experiences of others in their situation. With increased education about migration, the families themselves, and the social workers, counselors, and teachers who work with them can make the stretching with separation come a little easier and can ameliorate some of the emotional distress resulting from it.

Second, at the level of public policy, changes can be made to support Mexican families and help them stay together. While public officials are not necessarily concerned with the emotional aspects of family life, they certainly should be concerned about its affect-effects. In Mexico, lack of motivation, behavioral problems and apathy are severely undermining the Mexican school system as students opt out of education. Clearly this is not favorable to human capital development in Mexico. In the United

States, schools face similar problems when families are reunited there (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2001; Menjivar 2001). Those who consider the United States a nation of immigrants, like myself, should be concerned about issues like family separation, which ultimately affects immigrants' experiences of incorporation in the United States. Yet even those who think that Mexican immigrants do not belong in this country should be concerned with the plight of Mexican transnational families. While they do not recognize it, anti-Mexican immigrant groups and Mexican transnational families have something in common: both would prefer that Mexican families remain in Mexico, rather than come to the United States. The problem is that millions of Mexican families do not feel they can obtain economic mobility or even provide for the basic economic necessities of food and shelter by remaining in Mexico. My research shows that because family reunification is a complex process that involves negotiations among all members of the family, there are a number of points of intervention that can allow families to live together. Indeed, without addressing the needs of women and children in Mexico, the exodus north is likely to continue.

In summary, this dissertation has aimed to analyze parent-child separation as a migration strategy. In talking with and observing transnational families, I have found that women and children as well as men are powerful actors in their families. I have also found that those left behind during migration are as influential in shaping migration patterns as those who actually move abroad. I have suggested that crucial to understanding the consequences of separation during migration are considerations of the intra familial negotiations, and specifically the tensions families experience. These tensions cause hardships and stretch families. But tensions also keep relationships in

Mexican families taut as labor migration emphasizes intergenerational obligation. As such, Mexican families stretch, but parents and children are generally able to come back together after having lived apart.

Such a concise description of tensions within Mexican transnational families should not slight the complexities of family life. Each family is unique, and as the economic conditions individuals face vary, so do their emotional responses to separation. However, by conceptualizing family migration as a process of negotiation, I think we can avoid some of the pitfalls of the past in not only understanding, but also in working with immigrant families. It is by understanding family migration as a dynamic process that we can better address the needs of these families, whether in the schools in Mexico or in a social service capacity in the United States. Moreover, policy that either attempts to curb migration or control it, must account for the complex decision making processes within families in order to be successful.

Finally, by understanding intra familial negotiations in the context of labor migration, we can identify the ways in which economic structures in contemporary society affect relationships between individuals. I also hope that my portrayal of Mexican transnational families highlights the ways in which individuals seek to manage work and family responsibilities. Ultimately, this is a story about the impact of global migration patterns on the most intimate relationships of our lives, the bonds between family members. But it is also a story about the choices members of Mexican transnational families make which may not be so different, in the end, from the decisions middle class Americans might make if faced with similar circumstances.

APPENDIX A

FAMILY CONSTELLATION CAST OF CHARACTERS

Father-only Migrant Families

	Migrants	Caregivers in Mexico	Children (age at 1st interview)
1)	Angelo	His wife Gabriela	Chucho (6)
			Lalo (8)
			Gilberto (10)
			Javier (11)
2)	Esteban	His wife Yolanda	Hilda (12)
			Cynthia (16)*

*The couple has two other children. An 18-year-old son migrated to join Esteban in New Jersey when he was 16. A 20-year-old daughter had recently migrated to California after marrying a return migrant.

2)	Enrique	His wife Laura	Trinidad (25)
			Pablo (27)
			Paulo (30)
			Francisco (31)*
			Cassandra (32)

*Pablo and Francisco migrated and joined their father in the United States 10 years prior to our interviews. Seven years prior to the interview, Laura and Trinidad (because she was a minor at the time) migrated legally to the United States through Enrique's family-based petitions.

Single-mother Migrant Families

	Migrants	Caregivers in Mexico	Children (age at 1st interview)
1)	Paula	Her cousin Pedro and his wife Blanca. They have two children: Lola (17) and Jessy (8)	Cindy (15) Mateo (18)*

* Mateo joined Paula in the United States during the course of the study.

2)	Nicandra	Nicandra's mother until she passed away. Later on their own with a cousin (24) and his wife renting a room in the apartment.	Miguel (16) Tony (19)*

* Tony and Miguel joined Nicandra in the United States during the course of the study.

3)	Zelia	Zelia's mother Doña Adelaida	Juan Luis (7)

Migrant Couple Families

	Migrants	Caregivers in Mexico	Children (age at 1st interview)
1)	Ofelia Ricardo	Ofelia's mother and father: Doña Maria and Don Francisco	German (9)*

* The couple has a U.S.-born daughter who was 3 at the time of the first interview.

2)	Nancy Pedro	Nancy's mother Doña Tricia and younger sister (22)	Carla (8)*

* Carla joined her parents in the United States at age 6. She lived apart from them for four years. Nancy and Pedro also had a U.S.-born daughter three years younger than Carla.

3)	Nydia*	Nydia's mother and father	Kevin (5)
	Carlos	Doña Ana and Don Mateo	

* Nydia returned to Mexico to live with Kevin during the course of the study. Nydia gave birth to a U.S.-born child during the course of this study.

Migrant Couples who Divorce Post-Migration Families

	Migrants	Caregivers in Mexico	Children (age at 1st interview)
1)	Elsa	Elsa's mother Doña Ursula	Tina (13)
	Jose*	(both Jose and Elsa's siblings live in the neighborhood)	Brian (15)

* Jose had a U.S.-born child during the course of this study with his new partner.

2)	Armando*	Armando's mother Doña Mica (Also in the home: Mica's disabled son, two of her nephews, her mother).	Lupe (4) Mary (6) Michael (9)

* Armando returned to Mexico during the course of the study.

3)	Silvia	Silvia's mother Doña Beatriz	Lourdes(6)
	Daniel	her husband and their 7 children still at home including Roberto (17)	Samuel (8) Javier (9)*

* All three children were born in the United States. They went to live with Silvia's family for three years and have since returned to the United States to live with their mother.

APPENDIX B

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

EMOTIONAL ASPECTS OF SEPARATION

In the United States

Leaving children was a difficult decision for virtually all the parents I spoke with and parents' decisions were not uniform. Parents described struggling over when it was an appropriate moment to leave their children, how to say goodbye and what to tell their children about changes in their lives post migration. I also found that children in Mexican transnational families are highly affected by their parents' migration. Based on children's experiences, migrant parents may consider the following when weighing the pros and cons of how to manage family separation.

1. Understand that children may be resentful

Migrant parents were often perplexed and hurt by their children's rejection after they left home. After all, migrant parents are making significant sacrifices for the sake of their children. However, migrant parents can recognize that it is natural and normal that children be resentful of them for leaving home. The best solution to this situation is to show they care more, not less. Although at times children may not seem appreciative, migrant parents can be consistent in sending gifts home, sending money, calling and visiting whenever possible. Eventually the persistence may pay off. Even though migrant

parents feel that children are not responsive, these little demonstrations of love from afar count for children left behind.

In short, migrant parents can be reminded that they matter greatly to their children, despite what children say or how children may act. When children get upset at migrant parents it arises out of love which is best reciprocated with love, rather than anger or offense.

2. Consider the special needs of adolescents

Invariably, older children seemed to have the most difficult time adjusting to parents' absences. However, it is not always obvious to parents that this is a tough time to leave their children because during adolescence children can (1) understand their motivations for leaving and (2) tend to want to be more independent from their parents. The children I interviewed almost invariably missed their parents' presence at the same time that they experimented with greater personal autonomy during the teenage years. While parents should perhaps always trust their instincts, they can keep in mind that adolescents do not appear to react well to their parents' absences. They may be especially wary about making migration decisions during this period in their children's lives.

If parents must leave children at this age, parents can be cognizant of the difficulties their children may after they leave. For one, migrant parents can anticipate disciplinary issues and coordinate closely with caregivers in Mexico so that their children get the same message from both Mexican caregivers and migrant parents. Second, since separation appears to affect children's performance in school, parents can make special

arrangements to ensure that their children have sufficient support while they are away. They can also recognize that their children are likely to have difficulties in school after their departure and refrain from unrealistic expectations of their children's achievements in school.

Finally, some migrant parents leave young children who become teenagers while they are away. Migrant parents can keep in mind that their children's reactions to their absences will change during adolescence. They can be sensitive to these changes and attempt to provide additional support for their children during this period. For example, if it is possible, they can return to visit more frequently while their children are teenagers. Or they can make special purchases during this period, such as a home computer, to show teenagers that they care. Migrant parents can also expect that their children will shy away from them during adolescence, not uncommon even when parents and children live together, but they should not be offended. For example, if migrant parents stop calling because their children appear to lack an interest in them, their children are likely to grow more resentful. Especially during adolescence, communication at home should continue regularly.

3. Maintain Communication even if not able to send money

Many migrant fathers were ashamed to call home if they did not have any money to send their family members. While understandable, unfortunately this behavior appears to hurt family members in Mexico considerably. For the most part, families in Mexico understand that migrants in the United States face discrimination and may not always be

successful, especially initially, at fulfilling the family goals. For families in Mexico, and particularly children, in the end communication is more important than money.

Indeed when parents do not call home, gossip will most certainly be spread about what they are doing with money which they may not even have. While fathers (and some mothers) may feel pressure to provide for their families, they should try not to let this pressure inhibit them from being in contact with their children.

4. Maintain communication regarding changes in life abroad

If migrant fathers tend to stop calling home when they cannot send money, mothers often call home less frequently to avoid telling family members about significant changes in their lives post-migration such as divorce or a new romantic relationship. Again, this is completely understandable, particularly since migrant parents may not want to involve children in what are often unstable changes in their lives, at least for a time. Yet while migrant parents may want to wait to clue in their children about a new boyfriend or new living arrangement, they can continue to communicate with their children during this period. If they shy away from calling home, children feel even more resentful.

Moreover, parents can recognize that via gossip networks, children are likely to hear about changes in their lives before they are ready to tell their children about them. Often children defend migrant parents against this gossip and are hurt when they find out that the gossip is true, at least in part. Thus, migrant parents may want to clue in their

children as soon as possible to avoid feelings of betrayal. The greater level of communication with children, the greater trust children report with their migrant parents.

In Mexico

Migrant parents are not the only ones who can make things easier for their families during periods of separation. Families in Mexico can also learn more about migrants' experiences in the United States so as not to put undue pressure on their family members.

1. Recognize the economic difficulties migrants may face

Grandparents were generally aware of the economic difficulties migrant parents' may have, and Mexican children cited the discrimination Mexicans face in the United States. However, I found that they did not fully understand the social structure in the United States in which undocumented migrant workers were invariably at the bottom of the heap. Although most recognized the dangers of the border crossing, when I visited many schools in Mexico and students were invariably surprised when I explained the types of living conditions migrant parents endure to save money to send home, including living in unfinished basements to cut costs of living. They were shocked when I told them that one Mexican worker in the United States dies per day due to work related accidents and were nearly 80 percent more likely to die from work related accidents than native-born workers (Pritchard 2004). They did not understand that U.S. economy is structured around using undocumented labor and that were all the migrant workers from Mexico to

be successful, the U.S. economy could potentially collapse. (Note: most native-born U.S. citizens do not recognize the social structure either, but this is not the purpose of this dissertation.)

There are always some success stories in communities like San Angel, and Mexican families often wonder why their migrant family members are not able to do the same. While personality traits may matter, and luck certainly comes into play, families in Mexico can be educated about the larger political and economic forces that shape migration. At middle and high schools, I reviewed units on migration and found that the material covered in the class was so basic that it could not account for families' experiences. As a result, children were not able to make connections between their own lives and the larger social forces shaping their families.

If Mexican families have a better understanding of Mexican migration to the United States, they will understand that migrant parents will have difficulties while abroad. They can interpret a lack of remittances not as a personal failing, but rather as part and parcel of the migrant epic. Clearly, economic considerations for families in Mexico are highly important. However, in recognizing that failure lies in the system and not with migrant parent, children's relationships with migrant parents can improve considerably.

2. Understand that migrants' lives will change after living abroad

When migrant parents leave home, even if they do so well embedded in a social network of family and friends, the life they encounter in the United States is nothing like

the one they had in Mexico. Aside from the economic hardship, the social life in Mexican communities abroad is distinctly different. Often migrant parents feel lonely upon arrival. For one, socializing in the United States often involves alcohol, particularly for migrant men. As one migrant mother half-heartedly joked to me one day when I found her and her husband sipping beers after work, "Don't think, Joanna, that we drank like this in Mexico. It wasn't until we came here that we found the joys of drink." Second, migrants are likely to create new family ties and obligations in the United States to keep from missing what they had left behind in Mexico. While certainly this cannot absolve feelings of hurt when migrant parents start new families and the frustrations of money being spent elsewhere, families in Mexico can remember that much of these behaviors arise out of loneliness and because they love and miss their children and other family members in Mexico greatly.

3. Bear in mind that migrant parents love their children greatly

Often migrant parents go through periods when they do not communicate with children at home. Whenever I heard a child feel sad about a migrant parents' lack of communication, I was inclined to tell them that I felt sure that their parents loved them. This was because all of the parents I interviewed in the United States spoke fondly and wistfully of their children. Many, even the alcoholics and drug addicts I interviewed, grew sad and even cried at remembering their children left behind. In fact, I did not meet any migrant parents who did not care about their children at home. While it may not seem

like much, children left behind may feel somewhat consoled by remembering that their migrant parents love them.

4. Remember that children left behind are not alone

I was often shocked that children of migrant parents described feeling different, unique or strange for not living with their mother and father. Nearly all the children I interviewed said that they did not talk to friends about their migrant parents. Most shocking was that most of the children I interviewed lived in communities where at any given time, more than one in four children in the middle school were going through a similar experience. Children in Mexico, caregivers, schoolteachers and school administrators must remember that children of migrant parents are not alone. Many others go through similar experiences. When children feel different, unique and bad about their families, they are likely to act out even more. In contrast, if children left behind can be supported by those around them, and understand that migration patterns between the United States and Mexico mean that many other children are in their shoes, the hardship they feel at separation may be somewhat relieved.

PUBLIC POLICY

In the United States

In 1965 the Immigration and Nationality Act abolished the previously used national quota system and instituted a preference system that favored family

reunification, as well as occupational skills, in admitting new immigrants to the United States. However, today due to the high levels of migration from Mexico to the United States, many families are prevented from being reunified due to immigration law. As was mentioned earlier, as of April 2006, the applications for the legal migration of children and spouses of Mexican legal permanent residents being processed were filed nearly 7 years earlier (US Department of the State 2006). Seven years is an immensely long time in the life of a child: simply consider the difference between a 1 year old and an 8 year old boy, or a 7 year old and a 14 year old girl. Thus, despite the legal emphasis on family reunification, currently, U.S. immigration law is preventing many Mexican families from living together. Or, perhaps worse, Mexican families decide the wait is too long and reunite through illegal means. A sizable portion of unauthorized families, which represent 85 percent of Mexican immigrants arriving to the United States between 2000 and 2004, live in families of mixed legal status, with one or more adult with unauthorized status and or one or more child who is a U.S. citizen by birth (Passel 2005). In these families, different legal rights for different family members can mean that one child can go to college while another cannot. Or it can mean that one parent can be deported back to Mexico with significant bars to return legal migration. In short, U.S. immigration law has a long way to go to return to its goal of implementing family-friendly policies.

1. Make it easier for families to legally live together

The most obvious thing U.S. immigration policy needs to do is to make it easier for families to migrate legally together, or within one or two years of each other. Waiting lists need to be reduced significantly, particularly for the children and spouses of legal

permanent residents who must wait a number of years to become citizens and be eligible for the no wait immediate relative category (which does involve a wait of nearly a year for paperwork processing).

Yet rather than address the problems of family reunification inherent in the current system, proposals for immigration reform in early 2006 have focused almost entirely upon the other goal of U.S. immigration policy as stipulated in the 1965 reforms: the provision of temporary work visas to enable the United States to continue to benefit from Mexican labor without having to deal with the costs of families. While at this point any changes in immigration law that will allow Mexican workers some legal right to be in this country is favorable, it is unlikely that these types of proposals, which emphasize the legal admittance of one family member to work, will solve many of the current problems with migration for example the difficulties schools face incorporating newcomers or the health care crisis in many hospitals the uninsured utilize. Indeed, since Mexican families want to live together and have the social networks which allow them to do so, albeit through illegal means, Mexican families are likely to continue to be reunited in the United States because they want to be together.

2. Recognize women in migration policies

Women in U.S. migration policy are generally considered to be dependents in their families. Particularly in terms of Mexican migration, it is expected that women follow their men to the United States. Thus, any legalization program tends to trump

work opportunities for Mexican men with the assumption that migration benefits will trickle down to women and children once men are well-established in this country.

Mexican women are not dependents in Mexican migration to the United States. Although they often follow men in their families, women migrate because as individual actors they find that they lack sufficient opportunities in Mexico which are available to them in the United States. Any immigration policy that aims to provide some benefits to Mexican men, such as the labor contracts under consideration, should make provisions for female migrants as well. Otherwise, migration policy is likely to be male friendly, rather than family friendly, and put immigrant women in clear disadvantaged positions vis-à-vis the men in their lives something that provisions like the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which allows abused spouses of U.S. Citizens or Legal Permanent Residents to self-petition for immigration benefits, have acknowledged and tried to ameliorate.

3. Provide Temporary Travel Visas for Mexican Children

While interviewing children and caregivers in Mexico, one of the most common requests I got was for information on how children could visit their parents in the United States over the summer so that they would not miss school during the year. I had to explain that there is no provision for such visas and it would be unlikely for such a thing to be possible in the near future given the way that immigration law was heading. But, the question lingered in my mind. Why not?

As indicated by these requests, the idea would be that children could visit their parents over the summer during vacation but would consider Mexico their permanent residence. It seems like a good idea. Given the diverse interests of the families I interviewed, many of whom wanted children raised in Mexico, I am not so sure that opening up visas for young people would lead to a sudden influx of young migrants. And even if it did, what is so wrong with an influx of young people who are undocumented because they overstayed their visas? It seems much more humane than the current situation in which minors cross the U.S.-Mexican border at significant costs to their families, a high risk to their personal safety and great profits for human smugglers. The only difference between these young over-stayers and the currently undocumented minor population would be the means of getting here.

Although perhaps a pipe dream, much like that of immigration reform that actually helped families live together, summer visas for young students does not seem terribly impractical. To be eligible for a travel visa, minors would need to show proof of their attendance in the Mexican schools the previous years and that they are registered at the same school for the following September. For those concerned that such a policy could attract young workers instead of students, visas could be made available only to students ages 14 and under. Visas could even be stipulated only for students doing well academically, such as with an average of 7 or higher (in the 10 point scale used in Mexico). This would be an incentive for students to work hard throughout the school year in order to be eligible for their visa in the summer. Finally, students would need to have a sponsor in the United States. Although it is ideal that the sponsor be their migrant parent, if a parent is undocumented, it seems that it could cause problems for Mexican families.

There are a number of ways to get around this. The easiest, I think, would be to allow any Mexican school student to apply for such a visa as long as a United States citizen or permanent resident relative sponsored their summer trip. Even for students whose parents do not work in the United State, being able to visit the United States temporarily is likely to deter their curiosity for permanent migration later on. Indeed, on surveys of Mexican school students, most when asked if they wanted to visit the United States said yes, but almost all specified to visit or for vacation, rather than to stay and work. By satisfying their curiosity at a young age, a summer visa program for Mexican students might have the added benefit of encouraging Mexican students to remain in Mexico in the future.

In Mexico

The economic problems in Mexico that result in migration to the United States are many and are complex. It is beyond the scope of both my expertise and this dissertation to make recommendations as to how to fix the economy in Mexico so that so many people do not feel they must move to the United States to work. However, this research does indicate three areas for intervention in Mexico, which have not necessarily been previously addressed by other scholars who focus more on the macro-economic aspects of migration.

1. Provide opportunities for women in Mexico

As this dissertation has shown, women and mothers migrate to the United States because there is a severe lack of opportunities for them in Mexico. This is perhaps not much different from economic struggles that have resulted in the exodus of Mexican men

north. However, in the past, Mexican women have generally been considered family dependents in migration studies. Mexican women more generally, and mothers specifically, are no longer finding that dependency on their migrant husbands is satisfactory or economically viable. Women are taking on the roles of either helpers or breadwinners in their own right. As such, any policy aimed at reducing the causes of out-migration in Mexico, such those which try to develop markets for credit, insurance and capital, for example, must consider the unique needs of women in accessing these programs.

2. Provide opportunities for children in Mexico.

Likewise, young people need better opportunities in Mexico. Again, most of the students I surveyed wanted to go to the United States someday, but specified that they wanted to travel there or visit family; only a small percentage of students said they wanted to go to the United States to work. Unfortunately, most of these young people are likely to end up migrating north to work, rather than to sightsee, although the later is what they really want to do. Mexican children want to work in Mexico, but often find there are no opportunities to do so when they come of age. Specific policies can be addressed at the young workforce to help make the transition from student to worker possible and productive. This is particularly important, perhaps, in the states I visited in South Central Mexico including Oaxaca, Puebla and Guerrero where opportunities for higher education, even if a high school education are not economically feasible for many families.

3. Special support services in Mexican schools in areas of high out-migration

Many of the teachers and school administrators I spoke with understand the large impact migration has on students enrolled in their schools. Their knowledge for the most part arose from experience of working with many families in the region over the years in which migration northward has become a way of life. However, I did not observe any institutional structures to address the problems of migration on young students in Oaxaca, where I did most of my fieldwork in schools. In other words, I found that if a student was lucky enough to find a teacher or school director who understood the complexities of migration, they could find a great source of support in dealing with the emotional repercussions of their parents' migration. But, if a student was not lucky enough to be in a school where such a person was available, there were often no social workers available to work with these students and an opportunity for intervention is lost. Indeed, many schools only learned that students were having problems at home due to migration when a student had extreme behavioral problems or decided to drop out of school.

Lacking is a regional effort to train and educate those who work in schools about the ways the migration affects families and, in particular, children. Family separation due to international migration is not the same as what happens to a family after divorce or when one parent dies. It has specific characteristics, including gendered expectations of migrants and the elasticity of family reciprocities alluded to above. Moreover, family separation due to migration often leads young people to follow in the footsteps of their parents when they come of age. The schools I visited were badly in need of resources to deal with this phenomenon, most specifically a social worker, but also in terms of

migration curriculum in classes that address what students in the region are experiencing, rather than out-dated text book descriptions of the push and pull models of migration.

In other words, Mexican schools are an ideal site for social support services to Mexican youth who are experiencing difficulties in their families due to international migration. In regions with high-levels of out migration to the United States, schools need to receive training and extra resources to deal with the needs of this population. Given the proper resources, Mexican schools can do much more to support Mexican transnational families, discourage migration of their youth and provide opportunities for young people in their communities of origin.

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