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The Contemporary Family in
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THE FAMILIES OF LATINO UNDOCUMENTED ALIENS

by

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INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Bureau of the Census estimate that the number of immigrants in the last decade amounted to a conservative figure of 6.6 million of which 34% were from Latin America, mostly from Mexico and Central America; specifically from El Salvador and Guatemala. In 1980, the U.S. Bureau of the Census reported estimates of 2.06 million undocumented immigrants of whom 76.9 percent represented Central Americans, Mexicans and Caribbean. Of this proportion, 54.9 percent were Mexican born immigrants. This group alone account for more than half, at least 60%, of all Latin American arrivals and approximately for two-third's, or the majority, of the total Mexican American population in the United States (Mueller & Espenshade, 1985).

Mexican and Central American migration of the last decade has allowed entire family units to come to the U.S.A. under the "family reunification" provision of the immigration law of 1986. Women and children have been able to join family heads already established in this country; these groups have included migration of large numbers of single women as well (Rouse, 1988). Prior to this date women and whole-family units migrated illegally with the head of the family in hopes of gaining legal-immigrant status at a later time.

RECENT LATIN AMERICAN MIGRATION

Central American Migration: Prior to 1975, the flow of legal immigrants from Central American to the U.S. was under 10,000 per annum. Over the past decade however, over two million Central Americans have been uprooted, the vast majority of whom are Guatemalans, Nicaraguans and Salvadoreans. (Peterson, 1986)

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1 The term Hispanic is used interchangeably with Latino.

Mexican Americans are U.S. residents of Mexican origin.

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Unlike migration from Mexico, large scale population movement from Central America to the U.S.A. is a recent phenomenon. This massive human displacement over the last decade stems from a complex combination of political, social and economic factors. But, it primarily reflects the extent to which political strife impacts the "push" factors in migration (Feinberg & Carlisle, 1990).

It is important to note that recent immigrants and refugees from this region consider themselves political exiles and look upon their stay in the U.S. as temporary relocation rather than permanent resettlement. Most can be characterized by rural orientation with low levels of formal education, limited marketable work skills, thus employed at occupations normally not wanted by anyone else, that require long hours of work. They know they have an uncertain fate and live in constant fear of being deported. They see themselves as an uprooted people, mourning country, with separated and/or broken families, and disrupted community ties. Fear is a significant component of every contact with anyone outside of their immediate and close group; their new group relationships are close and not opened to outsiders (Cid & Montiel, 1990).

Migration from El Salvador: It is estimated that of the total Salvadorean population of 5.72 million, over one million people have migrated to the U.S.A.in the last decade (Montes,1987). Some estimates put the number of total displaced Salvadoreans at 974,000 to 1,725,000 of whom 245,000 to 310,000 came to the U.S. in the mid eighties, or 5 to 6 percent of the entire Salvadorean population . As it is to be expected with most undocumented populations, there is a dearth of information on new Central American immigrant groups. One study indicates that most Salvadorean migrants are much younger than the overall population of the U.S., over 70 percent are in the 15-44 age group and only 9 percent are over 45 years of age. Fifty five percent are male and approximately 21 percent are under age 15. At older ages, specifically those over 55, there are more females than males (Feinberg & Carlisle, 1986, Cid, 1986). The largest portion of their earnings are sent home to support extended family members who were left behind, what is

left is used to support themselves and family members at levels that allow only for the most basic subsistence. Because of high rates of illiteracy, both in Spanish and English, and undocumented status, there are few options regarding the type of employment available to them. Oftentimes they hold two jobs, involving long hours of work and low wages. Most have to rely on family members, neighbors, and/or friends to care for their children while they work (Montiel, 1990; Cid, 1990).

Mexican Migration: According to the Mexican Government 1986 figures, 84% of the Mexican undocumented entrants were men, 77 % were between the ages of 15 and 40 years, and 23% were under the age of 15 and over 40. They had 4.9 years of schooling, higher than that of the Mexican population in general; 90% came from the northern states of Mexico and 75% settled in Texas and/or California (Huerta, 1986). Most of the recent Mexican arrivals become urban residents and are absorbed rather easily into the work force and local economy. A unique migration pattern is noticed consisting of a variety of migratory statuses leading to what has been called a "circular migration". It occurs both among legal and illegal migrants resulting in a "culture of migration" or acceptance of migration as a way of life (Mueller & Espenshade, 1985). Thus, this migrant group is different from others in that strong, emotional, cultural and linguistic bonds are maintained on both sides of the border and as such have transcended geographical and political boundaries. Mexicans, particularly, maintain strong links with their former home and their national identity. The proximity to the country of origin, the constant flow of Mexican printed media, radio and television programs, and back and forth travel to the homeland, solidifies and revitalizes culture and language time and time again in this country reaffirming its symbols, values, beliefs, and customs to pass on to the next generations.

Social Supports

Maturation of immigration networks, or "transnational migrant circuits", that

started in the early 1950's has channeled large number of more recent Mexican immigrants, documented and/or undocumented, to specific areas of California (Rouse, 1988).

Residence patterns indicate that the majority of these undocumented groups are concentrated in the most populated states and in states with large numbers of Hispanic legally resident aliens. (Warren and Passel,1984). This pattern reflects what Cornelius (1988) has called the "built-in concentrating effect of the kin-mediated, chain migration process". Essentially, this means that new migrants generally tend to follow their predecessors, settling in the same U.S. communities and often working with the same employers.

It is in the **barrios** and **colonias** that these new sojourners are more likely to find social, cultural and linguistic supports as well as assistance in securing jobs and housing. But at the same time they join their predecessors who are often characterized by low educational levels, high school drop-out rates, under-employment and/or unemployment.

THE TRADITIONAL AND IDEAL HISPANIC FAMILY

It can be assumed that recent Latino immigrants, documented and/or undocumented, share a series of common characteristics and values with their predecessors who in many instances have been in this country up to five and six generations.

The "Ideal" Hispanic Family: Most Latinos inherited the traditional patriarchal family pattern from Spain that has maintained key characteristics throughout different historical periods since the conquest particularly as it pertains to role definition and assigned functions according to gender and age. However, inter marriage between the Spanish conquerors and Indian tribes led to cultural sharing and borrowing that has resulted in the blending of cultural patterns. For example, the matriarchal forms characteristics of several Indian tribes and the strong sense

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of "community" has been noted to appear in family patterns and interactions together with characteristics more typical of the classical patriarchal family pattern.

In the Hispanic patriarchal family model, masculinity and femininity were operationally defined according to the functions, responsibilities, and tasks assigned to each (Otero Luis Lenero, 1971). The family, as the foundation for a caring community, was a cultural value; as an institution it was the main mechanism to operationalize authority, the locus of control, protection, economic support, and procreation. The religious influence of the Catholic Church ascribed one over-all, primary function to marriage, that of procreation; the emotional nurturing between the marriage partners was relegated to a secondary position. The male had the responsibility for providing the material support, protection and authority. The oldest male son assumed that responsibility when the father was unable to carry out that function and/or was absent due to death or separation. Women seemingly accepted protection and economic support as indicators of societal concerns, assumed the role of nurturers and mediators in family conflicts particularly those between children and fathers. The institution of "machismo" as ideally defined within the traditional Hispanic family while it addressed the differentiation of function and social stratification. It also clearly promoted male superiority and control (Riding, 1985).

Specific expectations of male and female performance resulted in clearly delineated division of labor within and outside of the home. The husband made the decisions and assumed a key role in the discipline of the children; the wife was to accept them somewhat quietly. The husband was to provide the economic support and the wife was assigned the household tasks, the bearing, rearing, and nurturing of children. It was from mothering that women were to experience the close, emotional satisfactions as well as **las penas mas grandes** (the greatest sorrows).

The aged parents have held a place of significance and respect; grandmother in particular was delegated a good share of the nurturing tasks in the rearing of young

grandchildren. It was she who provided the continuation of religious education and ritual within the home as well as a bridge between the family and the outside world (Gonzalez Pineda, 1971). The grandfather assumed the function of transmitter of history, perpetuator of values and heritage. If, for example, the married sons or sons-in-law did not fulfill the expectations of support of their wives and children, it was the main responsibility of the grandfather to confront them and to insure that they met their obligations. In times of crisis, including economic need, the grandparents stood willing to share and lend every support. In turn, a mutual, helping, reciprocal relationship was expected of the grown sons and daughters, not only for economic support of the elderly but for emotional support as well.

The inclusiveness typical of the classical patriarchal family often assumed extended family expressions in the traditional Hispanic family. **Compadrazgo** (a voluntary social network which may include blood kin, and non-blood-related members formalized through religious ritual) appeared as an additional kinship layer. The networks of **compadrazgo** increased with each significant family landmark such as baptism, confirmation, **fiesta de quince años** (fifteenth birthday celebration for girls), and marriage. At least three pairs of **padrinos** (godparents) could be acquired at a marriage ceremony, and this network was even further extended by intra and inter relationships of **compadres, padrinos ahijados**, parents, grandparents and even **compadres** of **compadres.** The cycle was again repeated with each additional birth and marriage. Thus, the network increased becoming a formidable inter and intra connected, supportive network that in many instances provided not only emotional but economic supports in times of need. This very extensive network, for example, could dilute and ameliorate conjugal conflicts and tensions, it could withstand the loss of equilibrium experienced during the acting-out period of adolescence through the provision of guidance, mediation, support, reinforcement of values and expectations, and respite as the different households could also provide cooling-off periods for those in need.

It was thus, that the traditional patriarchal family model, seeming controlled by a single authority male figure, assumed different characteristics. In effect, the active presence and interaction of other households and members of the network modified the division of labor and the functions of different family members. Tasks, responsibilities, and authority was realistically shared among the extended networks to include blood kin, **compadres**, **tios**, **tios politicos** and grandparents, and authority and control diluted among the various family members found in different layers of the extended family.

THE IMPACT OF MODERNIZATION ON FAMILY CHANGES

It has been assumed that most present day Hispanic sub- groups, despite the process of modernization, industrialization, and americanization not only inherited but preserved most of the components of the traditional extended family. What may be opposing considerations stemming from the colonized status experienced by some Latino groups would point toward the possibility of other types of adaptations and family configurations.

Most theoreticians on modernization assert that the end result of modernization is a total, profound, persistent, and lasting transformation of all aspects of social, political, religious, economic, intellectual, and the psychological life of participants as well as their respective institutions. Moore (1965) states that modernization means "joining the club" of world knowledge through the adoption of organizational and technological know-how that is usually identified with the modern world. Economic development, the vehicle through which societies join the club, is the instrumental process for other reforms to take place, leads into social transformation. Changes follow in such areas as education, child rearing practices, means of economic support, religion, and culturally-predetermined norms. Modernization includes a higher standard of living, more equitable

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distribution of resources, the opening of social mobility, and the differentiation of cultural and value systems. There is an inevitable disruption, either temporary or permanent, of old established patterns. The process of change results in a "new set of social positions and new criteria of social placement and valuation resulting in a more complex and competing system of differentiation, or the change of key structural changes whereby special, separate social units evolve to perform specific sets of functions (Smelser, 1964).

Although it is often assumed that pre-modern societies function according to an "ideal" type of family structure, i.e. extended or patriarchal, these patterns may change radically through the process of modernization. It is believed that families change towards the conjugal or nuclear family pattern which is defined as having fewer members, the activities of such members becomes much more scattered, families are housed in much smaller quarters, internal control follows a democratic style, and original functions change, as well as their nature and quality, and the values and kinship ties. Earlier observers of the family in the process of change made generalizations to the effect that the family was in the process of disintegration and loss of function. However, it may be more accurate to state that the family undergoes a transitional disorganization due to the impact on crucial structural elements and previous functions (Moore, 1965).

According to Moore (1965), the belief that all cultures, through modernization, will converge towards a common culture overlooks that prior diversity of societies, the historical period in which modernization is taking place, the resistance of values to change, as well as the possibility of ideological changes and inter-changes between cultures. The possibility also exists that certain dimensions and functions ascribed to the previous family patterns were already in the process of dysfunctionality and thus more susceptible to the changes brought about by modernization, particularly if additional alternatives were made available under a radical societal change process. For example, the value of social responsibility to kinship beyond the nuclear family becomes weakened as a result of a value structure that recognizes

achievement rather than previous kinship obligations. Thus, kinship relationships become permissive rather than obligatory. The essential reciprocity and submission through rewards typical of traditional structures are substantially diminished. Conversely, the individual is more likely to make it on his own and thus reduces the necessity of consulting with his kin on important decisions. The mutual reciprocal helping patterns are diminished since members of the extended kinship, through recognition of achievement, are reluctant to ask for help. The conflict and tensions associated with these changes in behaviors can only be resolved through value changes. A new system of specialized social structures, proliferation of interest groups and associations develops to meet the needs previously met by large, kinship groupings. The result is an undermining of the previous informal social control functions, or additional loss of function on the part of some or all of the kinship units. According to Moore(1965) family disintegration, often defined as loss of control through a certain set of key events necessary through modernization, takes place.

Previous patterns associated with traditional family structures are modified. For example, tensions between the generations are precipitated as children will receive significant amounts of training from others not necessarily their parents or grandparents. The social position of women will begin to change as the family ceases to be a self-contained, economically productive unit. This would particularly apply to urban settings where the possibilities of female employment are better and there is greater freedom of movement for women as well as a greater amount of free time available (Goode, 1968).

It is not quite clear how industrialization alone has created changes in family life. It has been suggested that too little attention has been given to ideological variables existing at a particular time in a particular culture. It is possible that there are other family variables that have considerable impact upon the social structure, and that these variables may facilitate or retard the acceptance of any type of societal change. It is at this point that the ideology of the family could play an important

role by opening the way to the new family behavior as well as to the industrial role pattern.

The weakening of social integration by modernization is underscored by Rosow and others (Rosow, 1967). He defines social integration within two referents. One states that social integration is related to the network of linkages, reciprocal relationships, and functional connections between structures. The other integral part of social integration is the individual's web of beliefs, significant groups, and the position, with accompanying actions, that he occupies in his social structure. Similarly, social integration is defined by Axelrod (1956) as the social participation and/or interaction between the self and others, which manifests is expression through the institutional form of informal and formal social activities. The institutional informal activities are construed here to include family and kin, while institutional forms such as social activities, groups of friends, and communal peers.

THE COLONIAS AND BARRIOS

Toynbee (1948) describes a group, internal proletarians, which in some way is "in" but not "of" a given body politic at any given stage in the history of a particular society. There is a keen awareness of the situation, a continuing sense of ambiguity, and resentment on the part of those who feel unwanted after being disinherited from their ancestral place in society. Although there is continuous intermingling with the dominant group, a deep moral gulf exists between the two. Their overwhelming common experience is the feeling of having been robbed of their social and cultural heritage and converted into social outcasts and/or exploited and oppressed populations. In addition to economic disadvantages, other distinguishing characteristics are ethnicity, race, shade of skin color, preference and/or identification with a language other than the dominant society's. The psychological and moral impact of such a status can lead to distorted human relationships, destroy and/or petrify institutions as well (Fannon 1967). According

to Toynbee, the existence of these groups can be found in practically all of the ancient and present civilizations of the world.

In present day U.S.A. society, Latinos, specifically Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, have fulfilled the functions of internal proletarians. Large numbers reside in **barrios** and **colonias** located in practically every state where they are found. It is in these enclaves, or encapsulated communities, where solace and acceptance, and a form of community life can be found. As all contained communities, they allow for the development of coping mechanisms and intra-personal skills to cope with the demands of daily life. Such resources consist primarily of human potential (Litwak, 1965). At the same time, language, culture and customs that are different from those of the majority are a daily reminders of the confining effects and barriers that are set up by the dominant society's racist attitudes and practices (Wirth, 1965).

The **barrio** and **colonias**, with its emphasis on community and family support networks, illustrate an institution which can provide solace and comfort to an up-rooted immigrant group. As the above mentioned information indicate, the **barrio** is a place where immigrants first settle because they find a common language, similar values, customs, and where their given and/or assumed status can be expressed and accepted despite the pressures from a larger foreign and hostile environment. But, life in the **barrios** and/or **colonias** also impose upon its residents limited kinds of contacts that to a large extent determine the life that has to be lived within and the structures selected to organize their life. It is here where the Latino family as an institution has flourished for it carries out certain functions that ameliorate the exploitation and discrimination experienced from the dominant group.

For most Latinos, job discrimination, compounded by limited formal education, high drop-out rates, uninterested school systems, maladaptive vocational skills, language and cultural differences create a constant flow of crises. As it is the case in any crises, resolution in the **barrios** and **colonias** depends on the residents'

ability to deal with it, their reaction to it, the availability of support resources, and the events to which the crisis leads (Rapaport, 1962). In the daily life of Latinos, where crises seems to be the ever-recurring theme, extended families remain viable structures for meeting them at which time all types of resources are pooled for this purpose. Out of necessity, a form of family pattern, closer to the extended family, can be maintained and enlarged; a family that can provide some of the supports required to meet the constant state of crises.

There is no doubt that the colonized experience of those living in the **barrios** and **colonias** has an impact on family life style. Galarza, et.al, (1970) contend that in the inner solidarity developed in the **barrios** depend on mutual help and strong family and kinship ties. Mutual help has always been immediate, concrete, to the root of the matter, not susceptible to administration by third parties, always creating and reinforcing a sense of obligation for some future time.

THE HISPANIC FAMILY TODAY

It has been assumed that the traditional and ideal familial configuration, with modifications over time, was an inheritance that found its way into the rural and urban Hispanics **barrios** and **colonias** in this country. The time, sequence and reasons for the various migrations as well as the historical events faced my immigrants in this country undoubtedly have had an influence on the degree of the continuation and practice of traditional patterns. Certainly a combination of factors and forces that have consigned these groups of people to a exploited and usually poverty-stricken experience in the **barrios** and **colonias** of cities and rural areas in this country have resulted in distinct family configurations and patterns. It is quite possible that while Mexican and Central American immigrants have inherited traditional familial patterns, with Hispanic and Indian dimensions, other arrangements, designs, adjustments and beliefs molded by a colonized and immigrant experience have developed.

There is considerable evidence that for most Hispanics in general and for Mexican and Salvadorean specifically, the family, in whatever configuration, continues to be the most important support resource for coping with life' stresses, regardless of length of residence in this country, social class, religious preference, or geographical place of residence.

The Mexican and the Mexican American Family: The **Mexican** family has changed relatively little through the centuries after the conquest and colonization by the Spanish. The family in Mexico has remained a strong institution that is fundamentally conservative. Its extended form provides a support structure for the young, the old, orphans, visiting family members, or those family members in transition. It is a patriarchal and authoritarian structure that conditions its members to accept the hierarchical social patterns that characterize that country. While there have been profound changes in the country, it has been said that there has been less changes in the family structure and function (Riding, 1985). For the majority of Mexicans, the family continues to be the main social institution. While the extended family is self sufficient, it is a closed system to outsiders. Social life revolves around relatives, children play with members of the family, women socialize with other women family members. In fact, it has been said that Mexicans need few friends because they have too many relatives.

In rural areas, the family patterns have changed even less throughout the centuries, thus "the life cycle is reduced to a ritual where family roles and functions are predetermined". A double standard between men and women remain intact, particularly in rural areas and in the economically disadvantaged classes; changes in behalf of women of the middle and upper class are really not significant. The rate of infidelity among men is high and to a certain degree condoned; it is prohibited in women. In years of economic stability, men considered the support of their children, whether the product of marriage or not, a moral responsibility. Zuniga-Martinez (1979) found that Mexican Americans, like their counterparts in Mexico, maintain the primacy of the family as a cultural traidition in the **barrios**

and **colonias** in this country. **Mexican American** culture is family oriented; it is extended and intradependent. Kin live next door, on the same block, or within a short walking distance of one another, forming supportive, intradependent relationships. The Mexican American extended family differs from that of the dominant white majority in at least two main aspects: for the dominant society, the extended family is seen as a kin system organized along consaguinal rather than conjugal lines, consisting of a network of subfamilies often residing in the same household. For most Mexicans Americans, the extended family includes relationships other than those defined by consanguinal and/or conjugal lines.

In his analysis of the Mexican American family, Montiel (1978) concluded that although the make-up of the family can vary according to class and rural/urban orientation, closely knit extended families are seen as an advantage and are a cultural value. Reciprocal help among members and across generations has been considered the main support in managing stresses of daily life and in coping specifically with the many manifestation of discrimination. These functions coincide with those ascribed to the Mexican traditional family; specifically, through its interdependent and interactive kin network, mutual and reciprocal help among its members is sought and allowed.

Past research (Kluckholn & Strodbeck, 1961, Clark, 1959; Rubel, 1966) and more recent research (Fitzpatrick, 1971; Sotomayor, 1973; Bastida, 1979) dealing with elderly Hispanics points out that Mexican Americans are more closely involved with local kin groups than is the majority society; emotional and financial support received from their families is perceived as the main factor that influence their well-being. According to Valle and Martinez (1982) the aid that Mexican American families provide to members is critical to their survival. Sabogal and Marin (1987) studied the effects of acculturation on family attitudes. They found that despite differences in national origin, family support appeared to be the most essential dimension of Hispanics, with the bulk of their sample being of Mexican descent. The authors noted that the perception that family support would be available when

needed did not diminish with the level of acculturation. The protective function of family support in preventing stress or in mitigating its impact was also examined by Vega and Kolodny (1985). The findings from data collected from 635 white non-Hispanics and 533 Mexican Americans seemed to support the results reported by Keefe, Padilla, and Carlos (1979) and others that family support systems provide a buffer against the development of stress in Mexican Americans.

The findings from the above studies also support the notion that the extended family is a vital social support system that reserves a special role for certain family members, such as elders, women and young. While Torres-Gil and Negm (1980) suggested that the socioeconomic barriers encountered by the Mexican American elderly may make them more dependent on their natural support networks than their white counterparts, nevertheless economic support was seen as one of the key factors in a relationships of reciprocity. According to Sotomayor (1973), Miranda (1980), and Maldonado (1979), the reciprocal supportive relationship that exists between older Mexican American and their families serves as a source of mutual support and/or protection especially during times of crisis. Valle and Martinez (1980), Valle and Mendoza (1979), Keefe, et al. (1979) and Sena-Rivera (1980) also found that helping interaction is essential to the well-being of all family members. These authors suggest that for Mexican American populations, the family as an institution has been a mediating force between the individual and society; it negotiates with other community systems and brokers resources for its individual members and for itself as a unit not necessarily diminished with years of living in this country, levels and degrees of interaction, and/or immersion in the majority society. It is in the emotional proximity and in the commitment to these relationships that support and intradependence is defined. In these types of relationship, help giving and help receiving is the key characteristic that enables the family members to mange general stresses of daily living.

Other views exist on this subject, however. Crouch (1972) suggested that the extended Mexican American family may be a myth. Maldonado (1979) raised

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questions about the irreversible effects of modernization and growing family mobility on family values that can change the role and status of the elderly within their own family units. Laurel (1979) found younger Mexican Americans departing from traditional roles with regard to caring for elderly parents. And Markides (1984) in an ethnic comparative study in Texas, found little indication that older Mexican Americans are more apt than older Anglos to be cared for by their own intergenerational family network.

Other family dimensions have remained relatively intact particularly as it pertains to role and function of men and women and the accompanying division of work. While it is true that more Mexican American women are in the labor force, functions of childbearing, nurturing, and homemakers remain relatively unchanged. While Mexican American men might not be able to fulfill their role as breadwinners because of socioeconomic factors experienced in this country, the extended family by necessity has to come to his rescue. The same situation is prevalent as it pertains to discipline and authority.

The Salvadorean Family: The configuration of the Salvadorean family is significantly different from that of the Mexican. Its uniqueness centers around the institution of marriage. Marriage is not a pre-requisite for bearing and rearing children and/or establishing a "family" Thus, marriage is not a cultural value shared by the majority. Nor is it necessarily determined by social class or rural orientation. In this types of families, a life-long commitment to one individual is not always sought. For the men, this provides an easy out of the relationship, either emotionally, morally and economically. Male and female relationships from the view of outsiders can appear as ocassional liaisons rather than long lasting unions that bear and rear children. In this type of arrangement, the father does not necessarily has to be an integral part of a "family" as traditionally defined; sometimes he is there are sometimes not. While children are highly valued, conceiving and bearing them is primarily an affirmation of being female and male. On the other hand, while they are born out of wedlock, this is not a stigma; fathers and children acknowledge and recognize

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each other, families take the children as legitimate members of the extended family network, and female companions can raise children of other companions (Larin, 1990; Celaya, 1990, Gilad, 1989).

In this type of configuration, the mother assumes the main responsibility for rearing and nurturing children, and for their economic support as well. Grandparents, on both side of the parents assist in every way as they too are an integral part of the extended family network. The members of the **compadrazgo** network, as it is the case with Mexican families, have specific responsibilities toward their god-children including economic support in times of need. The intergenerational family network is further expanded by friends and often neighbors. The values of help giving and help receiving, friendship, work, and sharing are very much at the core of these extended networks; in fact, it is the glue that binds them together. The mother and the grandmother are the obvious transmitters of culture, to include religion and tradition. (Larin, 1990; Celaya, 1990; Cid, 1989; Gilad, 1989).

It is understandable that Salvadoreans do not migrate as "families" as commonly conceptualized, but as networks. A pattern of incremental chain migration is evident whereby an individual usually follow a relative, close friend, neighbor, or village resident (Larin, 1990). Reunification of network members is a strong objective of most migrants so that the original intergenerational family network can be reconstituted. If this is not possible, new networks develop with the functions and responsibilities re-negotiated as needed (Gilad, 1989).

A disproportionate number of women have migrated alone primarily to seek work and support their children back home who more often-than-not have been left behind with grandparents, usually the grandmother. Bringing the child, or children to this country can take considerable time resulting in long periods of separation between the mother and children that require a number of adjustments and interchanges (Montiel, Cid, Dubril, 1990).

It is thus that Salvadoreans have constructed in the U.S.A. a type of "family" that

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resemble an extended family and perform the functions of social support networks that can include, but not necessarily limited, to blood related kin. Because of economic restrictions, relatives and non-relatives reside in a extended households that increase the likelihood of help giving and help receiving relationships. Gilad's (1989) study of Salvadorean elderly, found that 91 percent were living with children which allowed them to continue some traditional roles such as giving advice, teaching religion, and carrying out household chores. The findings of this study suggest that the shared interactions and exchanges that exist within these networks are as supportive in this country as they were in their native county. Most of the elderly in the sample, mostly women respondents, saw their exchanges as reciprocal or equal in value and felt a close relationship with their network members. Thus, the functions of the reconstructed network are significantly maintained. (Gilad, 1989).

DISCUSSION

Throughout the ages, the family has been defined in many different ways. In most instances these definitions have failed to reflect the rich pluralism of racial, cultural, ethnic diversity, and the wide variety of lifestyle choices which differentiate present day families. The family can be a tradition, a value; it can be defined for its structure and for the functions it performs, such as rearing children, transmitting society's values, creating and maintaining a common culture. Families have been defined according to legal marriage or to blood relatedness. Other define their family by making a commitment to share living space with someone else eventually developing into close emotional ties. In actuality, a family becomes a family when two or more individuals have decided they are one, acknowledge that there is sharing of emotional needs and closeness, interact, and communicate with each other in the here-and-now environment in which they gather. It is a family when its members have living space which is seen as home,

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and find an opportunity to perform those roles and tasks necessary for meeting their biological, social and psychological requirements. The family within this context, is seen as a living system that is constantly changing and adapting.

As the families of these two Latino groups demonstrate, the extended family can include intergenerational relationships other that those defined by consanguinal and/or conjugal lines such as **compadres, comadres, tios politicos, primos, primos politicos**, friends, friends of friends, and so on. It is in the proximity, but also in the commitment to these relationships that support and intradependence is defined. In these types of relationships, help giving and help receiving is the key characteristic that enables the family members to manage the general stresses of daily giving.

The debate continues whether there is irrevocable erosion of the traditional Latino family as it pertains specifically to extensive support networks, mutual help, and interdependence that can be expected among its members. There is little empirical evidence to substantiate the assumption that the longstanding supportive and reciprocal relationships which traditionally have existed between the different family members has changed. Rather, the family, in whatever form it is defined, emerges as the most important support network available to the Latinos under stress and as such it must be recognized and strengthened. The potential to dilute family tensions and conflicts through the use of its extended intergenerational kinship networks, shared responsibilities for decision making and caregiving through its traditional supports, must be mobilized.

There is no doubt that urbanization, poverty, discrimination, high school drop-out rates, illiteracy, lack of opportunities, unemployment, exploitation and cultural conflict and shock are forces that can and do disrupt traditional values and distort familial relationships. Support and mutual help giving patterns can be weakened, lost or placed in abeyance. This situation is often aggravated by the lack of access to health care and human services undermining the basic functions of the family.

As it is the case with all families, Latino families which could be described as

strong, adaptive, and well-functioning may become overburdened at particular times during the family life cycle. The more vulnerable periods often occur as a result of significant events in the family that mark a particular transition such as immigration; these are times when the family is undergoing significant changes in organization, division of work, living arrangements, emotional realignments, or at times when the forces for change are more powerful than those for sameness. Central Americans, specifically, are experiencing even more stress because of the unexpected changes brought about by civil war that has brought community fragmentation, network disruption and massive immigration. Under these circumstances, the family may find its adaptive capacities stretched to its very limits without the traditional community supports that can assist or facilitate resumption of family balance.

The definition of an issue determines the identification and selection of tools for its understanding. For example, there is a point of view that posits that the Latino extended family has lost its usefulness and/or that it has been destroyed by the forces of modernization and urbanization, or americanization that inevitably leads to acculturation. It is believed that an irreversible result of "acculturation" into the majority society is the eradication of this reciprocal help giving help receiving resource. This perspective does not provide a multi-faceted and in-depth view of the many components that determine the effectiveness and well-being of the family, not their interelationships, interfaces, and juxtaposition over time. Rather, it connotes a passive system, vulnerable to the whims and forces of the environment.

The notion of "adaptation" is more aligned to the understanding of multi-dimentional, person-environment transactions that are suggested in the definition of the family as a living and constantly changing system. Within this perspective, the family resumes its equilibrium in order to survive and/or to sustain some sort of adaptive balance with its environment. Key to the entire process of resuming

balance, or adaptation, is the system's ability to receive, process, store, borrow, share, and make use of information; the family in this context becomes a give and take communication system. This information pool becomes a map of the environment that guides the family's goals as it copes with the environment and determines the measurement of their outcome. As the individual is immersed in the family, culture becomes an intimate part of self and it might not be readily accessible to new awareness. It is through this process that the Latino family assumes such an important role in the transmission, continuation, sharing and borrowing culture, as well as in the establishment of one's identity that in turn is affirmed over and over as one sifts through the environment in recognition of familiar symbols. Language as a system of symbols of communication is a reflector of culture. Thus, culture and language are crucial to the determination and the assertion of one's identity. For Latinos in this country, the omission of those symbols intimately attack the sense of self. This process is particularly played-out in the educational arena, as cultural shock and cultural conflict are reflected in poor academic performance, high school drop-out rates, action out behaviors, and other dysfunctional behaviors. The lack of re-inforcement of familiar cultural and linguistic symbols attacks the sense of identity, the perception for who we are, where we come from, and where we are going.

There are variations and exceptions in every society and culture. No doubt there are Mexican and Mexican American and Salvadorean families that are quite different from the traditional; as in any other group, there are also dysfunctional families. In order to support the family as a viable coping mechanism, the tools and the skills that will allow most of the Latin families to cope with the environment in a more rewarding manner must be sought so as to improve their well-being.

The path for well-being is not always very clear for these families who have to cope with the expected changes that are part and parcel of life, but also with changes brought about by war, loss of country, loss of loved ones, and cultural conflict.

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These events and forces can shake the family's equilibrium as severely and profoundly as discrimination, poverty, domestic violence, and substance abuse. In these circumstances, challenging and sometimes unfamiliar or painful coping responses on the part of the family are required. Oftentimes the family's emotional and physical energy as well as its available concrete resources may indeed become dissipated and overwhelmed.

However, the way the family perceives itself determines its ability to weather stress and strain and influences the types of responses to cope with anxiety generated by particular events. The family's range of experiences determines the skill armamentarium accumulated by the family over the years and through the generations to solve specific problems. A good examples is the biculturism and bilingualism of Latino families. For such individuals, two sets of behavioral or linguistic skills could assist them to access, negotiate, and broker community resources such as health care, educational, and human services. Each of us are immersed in our family system, in whatever form is defined who we are, how we think and communicate, what we choose to do and to be, whom we choose to be with, to love, and to marry is in some part a function of that complex system that has developed over the generations. While families are indeed embedded in the larger culture, they also develop their own styles or cultures over the generations whose traditions deeply affect the lives of its members. While we cannot underestimate crucial influences of the larger social and economic factors in shaping the nature of human life, or the uniqueness that each person brings to his or her own experiences, the importance of the generations before us cannot be overlooked. This intergenerational perspective is quite different from the individualism that is valued in American society. Growing knowledge about our families can lead to an appreciation of the importance of relationships between current individual and family development on one hand, and powerful intergenerational themes on the other. All persons, to some extent, are affected by this powerful intergenerational system and their lives are in certain respect the

receptors of historical family's transmission (Hartmann, 1988).

All human beings need to relate to other human beings; at the same time, every human being strives to develop a sense of personal identity in which the self is clearly different from the others. This is particular difficult concept to understand as it pertains to Hispanic families where the different generations play such an important role in defining the specific culture of a given family. Yet, in order to support the Hispanic family, is most important to understand the family of origin and its impact on the present; to understand that the unique way a person perceive himself/herself is determined by one's parents, sex, sibling position, quality of relations, networks, environmental contingencies at developmental transition points, as well as in the nature of its intergenerational transactions.

Well-being for the individual family member, as it is for the family network as a unit, is to establish a sense of equilibrium between the environment, its group culture, the culture of the family over the generations, the here and now, as well as the unique way each individual chooses and/or is able to cope with life.