

Salvadorans in Somerville: Changes in Family Structure and Gender Roles Among Salvadoran Immigrants

*Cecilia Dos Santos
Lexie McGovern*

*Assisted by Somerville High School Students:
Esther Flores
Dan Lemus*

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Introduction

Project Description

The Urban Borderlands seminar at Tufts University was designed by professor Deborah Pacini-Hernandez three years ago to facilitate a community based research project to document the oral history of the Latino Community. This research originally began in Cambridge and has now shifted to include a focus on Somerville, Massachusetts. The class offers students the opportunity to conduct their own fieldwork in the surrounding communities that otherwise might not be explored. The open-ended nature of the research project allows each student to focus on his or her own interest areas in order to make the semester-long project really valuable for them as individuals.

The Urban Borderlands students this semester worked in collaboration with a number of Somerville high school students most of whom live in or around the Mystic View Housing Complex. High school and Tufts University students were linked together through the assistance of the Welcome Project, a neighborhood community center located within Mystic View. The Mystic View Housing Developments are subsidized government housing projects where the majority of its residents are low-income families. We were paired with two high school students from Somerville High, Esther Flores (17) and Dan Lemus (16). Both students were born in the U.S. and come from Salvadoran immigrant family backgrounds. They became an integral part of our research and through developing a personal relationship with us, they introduced us to their community.

Coming from immigrant backgrounds, we saw this as an opportunity to explore an area of both personal and academic interest to us. We are young, female, university students from the lower and upper ends of the American middle class. We come from recent immigrant families of several different backgrounds. Lexie McGovern is the daughter of an Irish immigrant who immigrated to the U.S. in his 30's, and a Mexican-American mother who was raised on the border between Mexico and Texas. Cecilia Dos Santos was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and her parents decided to immigrate to the U.S. in 1987. Our unique backgrounds have made both of us sensitive to the immigrant experience.

After considering what previous Urban Borderland students had researched and discovered, we choose to focus on a more personal topic. Our class chose to focus on topics including, Latino businesses, ESL classes, Latino soccer leagues, and forms of Latino "volunteerism". We, on the other hand, sought to capture the voice of the individual Latino immigrant in order to give him or her a place for self-representation and expression of his or her individual experience. Our topic evolved the more we became involved with direct and personal research. Initially we looked to record actual migration stories and experiences, paying particular attention to gender differences within this process. After conducting our first two interviews with this initial topic in mind, we discovered that this area was far too personal to explore. Our final decision which is now the premise for this report was to observe and record the shifts in gender roles and family structure among Latino immigrant families, specifically Salvadoran families.

Our interest in the changes in gender roles stems from the fact that we are both young females, products of the post-feminist movement within an American society. Due

to our generation's greater consciousness of gender constructions within societies and cultures, we are interested in how these constructions are created cross-culturally and especially how they are transformed among immigrant families. In addition we hope that our research will shed light on a significant community within Somerville of which there has been no recorded history. We hope that our final report will give credit and acknowledgment to the contributions of female immigrants and their families who are often overlooked. Because we explored many gender-related issues, our female bias and the female bias of the majority of our participants, our report gives voice not only to the immigrant experience but to women who sustain this community. It is important to recognize their efforts and contributions to their individual families as well as to the greater Somerville community. Our hope is that this will bring respect and appreciation to both the men and women who have struggled and succeeded to establish themselves in a country distant from their *patria* (home country).

Methodology

Our research method was based entirely on recorded life-history interviews. We often met at our interviewees' homes to conduct our interviews. Interviews typically lasted 45 minutes to an hour and were conducted entirely in Spanish because it was obvious that most of our narrators were more comfortable in their native language rather than in English. The atmosphere was generally informal, despite the awkwardness of having a tape recorder present. The people who allowed us to conduct interviews were extremely willing and open to share their experiences with us without hesitation. Our questioning technique began with basic biographical information and then led into comparisons of family life in El Salvador and in the U.S. We questioned our narrators

about shifts in the gendered work structure, changes in the relationships between males and females, as well as relationships between parents and their children. Throughout our questioning, we never asked about the legal status of any of our narrators. For this reason and also because of the highly personal and sensitive nature of our topic, we chose not to include our narrators' last names and their contact information. Our high school partners provided us with initial interviews with their family members. From here we turned to relatives and friends of our first narrators. We also generated a list of possible participants through the help of Nelson Salazar, director of the Welcome Project and Cecilia Sosa-Patterson, an active community leader.

Research Limitations

Throughout the investigative process of this project, we have come to realize that our research and our analysis are influenced by a great number of limitations. In saying this, we wish to make clear that any conclusions or analyses we draw in our project are in no way reflective of all Latinos, or even more specifically the Salvadoran, community in Somerville. In order for our readers to fully comprehend the various perspectives present in our final report, we wish to acknowledge the limitations we faced throughout our research.

Our most obvious setback was the fact that our research timeframe was limited to one semester (approximately 14 weeks). This is simply not enough time to thoroughly research and investigate any topic concerning a specific population and to expect to have an adequate sampling and representation of the community as a whole. The time constraint forced us to depend solely on recorded interviews with little or no space to extend our research to more extensive participant-observation. Due to the time constraint,

we were able to conduct only ten complete interviews, most of them with families from within the Mystic View Housing Development. While this course is focused on the Latino communities in general, we focused specifically on the experience of Salvadoran immigrants who arrived in the US in the 1980's, with the exception of three who arrived in the 1990's. Another factor to consider is that seven of our ten interviews present a female, specifically mothers' perspective on the immigrant experience. In addition, not only were the families from the same Somerville neighborhood, but due to our snowball-sampling research technique, our interviewees are related or have a previously established personal relationship with one another. This obviously predetermines interconnected experiences.

Not only is our research limited by the unique perspectives of our ten informants, but it is also heavily influenced by our own backgrounds and biases. As we mentioned previously, our own gender, socio-economic, and racial/ethnic identities have influenced our observation patterns, the direction of our questioning during interviews, and any conclusions we have drawn in terms of comparing family structure in El Salvador to the United States. Finally, we would like to reiterate that we are by no means attempting to represent the experiences of the Latino community in Somerville as a whole through the narration of ten Salvadoran immigrants' individual perspectives. Our initial and continuing goal is to represent the experience of our ten families alone and allow each of them to voice their struggles, desires, goals, and opinions through the telling of their personal stories.

Lastly, we feel that in order to personally benefit the individuals and families who so willingly contributed to our research, we plan to translate our entire final report to

Spanish. As all our interviews were conducted in Spanish and many of our interviewees are more comfortable in their native language, we wish to continue to respect that unique aspect of our research. Translation of our final report will take place during the weeks following the community presentation of our project at the Welcome Project on December 12, 2003.

Family Tree: Brief Introduction to our Narrators

Emma: Born in El Salvador in 1964; married with nine children, four of whom were born in El Salvador and five of whom were born in the U.S. (currently six are living in the U.S. with Emma and three are still in El Salvador). Immigrated to the U.S. in 1993 while pregnant, three years after her husband arrived. She is currently a stay-at-home mom taking full responsibility for domestic duties and childcare.

Rosa: Born in San Miguel, El Salvador in 1961; married with four children, two of whom were born in the El Salvador and two of whom were born in the U.S. Immigrated to the U.S. in 1985 with her two young children two years after her husband Roberto. She is currently a full-time mother and a custodial employee in Boston, Massachusetts.

Roberto: Born in El Salvador in 1956; married with four children (wife is Rosa). Immigrated alone to the U.S. in 1983 to meet his brother in Cambridge. He currently works as a custodian for both a private office and the John Hancock Building in Boston, Massachusetts.

Alma: Born in Aguilares, El Salvador in 1975; single with two children, both of whom were born in the U.S. She immigrated alone to the U.S. in 1985 with the help of a *conocido* (close friend). She works outside the home and is the sole caretaker and financial supporter of her children and home.

Luis: Born in San Pedro, Cuzculan, El Salvador in 1977; single with no children. Immigrated alone to the U.S. in 1993 with the help of a *conocido*. He is currently a full-time undergraduate student at Tufts University in Somerville, Massachusetts.

Ana Cecilia: Born in Usulután, El Salvador in 1962; married with three children all of whom were born in the U.S. Immigrated with a female friend in 1983, she has since brought her mother to live with her family. She currently works at Somerville Mental Health as a home-visitor for Latino families. She is also taking college-level courses in Child Development.

Ana Hilsia: Born in San Miguel, El Salvador in 1983; single with a two month-old baby boy born in the U.S. Immigrated alone in 2001 with the help of her relatives, her aunt Rosa and uncle Roberto. She lives together with Rosa, Roberto and their family. She currently works at Tello's Retail in East Boston, but is on maternal leave.

Marcos: Born in El Salvador; married with three children all born in the U.S. Immigrated alone to the U.S. in 1980. He is one of the original founders and presently one of the director of C.O.R.E.S. (Comite de Refugeados de El Salvador).

Ester: Born in Santa Ana, La Union, El Salvador in 1963; single with three children, one of whom was born in El Salvador and two of whom were born in the U.S. Immigrated alone to the U.S. in 1985 with the help of her relatives in San Francisco. She is currently in the labor force at a factory working with recyclable materials. She is also the sole caretaker for her children and home.

Chapter 1: The Migration Process

The journey from El Salvador to the United States is one of great peril and danger. The threat from the physical exhaustion of the journey, untrustworthy *coyotes*, and the US Immigration and Naturalization Services exceeds what one might imagine. Many of our narrator's spoke freely to us about these and other dangers they experienced during their migration. Considering the great risks that these immigrants encounter throughout their flight, one might wonder why so many Salvadorans journey thousands of miles to reach the United States. Why are so many fleeing their *patria* (country of origin)?

The majority of our narrators emigrated from El Salvador in the earlier half of the 1980's. They attributed their desire to immigrate to the US to several different causes, all however expressing the same unhappiness with life in El Salvador. The most notable cause for immigration was the Salvadoran Civil War. Too many of our narrators lost loved ones because of the political violence; others felt threatened directly by the violence. In order to prevent themselves and their families from suffering the same fate as so many others they decided that migration to another country was the best and safest option. Others attributed their immigration to the dire poverty they were experiencing daily. One narrator, Emma, bluntly states "*la vida [en El Salvador] fue muy triste*", life in El Salvador was very sad (Interview 10/4/03). Emma went on to describe that her husband's work in the campo was generating very little income. Such poverty filled their lives in El Salvador with many hardships. Many of our narrators found that in addition to the poverty, there were no employment possibilities in El Salvador. Ana Cecilia is one

Comment: Do you think I need more background into on the Civil War or are we assuming that the audience is informed?

such example; after completing high school in El Salvador, she began looking for a job, but was unsuccessful.

Me vine por...por digamos...falta de trabajo...yo recién había salido de lo que se llama aquí high school. Y este...no había mucha fuente de trabajo. Entonces se me presentó la oportunidad de...de una persona para venir para acá, y entonces dije bueno sí voy. Para ver que podría encontrar acá, si podía trabajar.
I came to the US because of...lack of work...I had recently finished high school. Yet, there was no source of employment. Then I was presented by a friend with the opportunity to come here, and I said, ok, I'll go.(Then an opportunity was presented to me by a friend to come here) To see if I could find work, if I would be able to work here (Interview 10/19/03).

Despite the advantage Ana Cecilia had in earning a high school diploma there was still no work prospects for her.

The decision to leave their *patria* was one filled with great uncertainty and hesitation. Although this was difficult, many of our narrators felt they had connections to El Salvador in the US though their strong sense of social networks. All of our narrators had links to El Salvador through family and friends who had immigrated to the US earlier. These social networks provided our narrators with financial assistance to secure their arrival to the US, and upon arrival helped the recent immigrants find housing, jobs, and other essential basic social services. These social networks were and still remain vital to the survival of recent immigrants; without these networks adequate housing and employment would be very difficult to find.

In addition, the surrounding communities of Boston such as Somerville and Cambridge offered our narrators a further opportunity for housing, jobs, and social services. They were welcomed into this community as equals regardless of their citizenship status. In April 1987, the Somerville Board of Alerdmen (BOA) designated Somerville a Sanctuary City. This was part of the larger Sanctuary movement which

acknowledged the many Salvadorans and others from various Latin American countries, who were fleeing the Civil Wars and entering the US illegally. The resulting resolution of this movement gave these individuals entitlement to “the same basic rights and privileges as documented city residents” (MHRAB Documentary Heritage Grant 3). The decision to designate Somerville a Sanctuary City created a haven for many Latino immigrants where they could work, live, and raise their families. The Latino population, and thus the Salvadoran population, have grown greatly in Somerville over the years and are now estimated by Concilio Hispano to be around ten thousand (MHRAB Documentary Heritage Grant 1). Through the migration stories of our ten narrators, one will notice how this community has grown.

It is significant to observe the gendered pattern of migration in our ten narrators; who decided to come first? Did it matter if one was male or female? The gendered pattern of migration, we found depended on a few individual factors; the most important being marital status. For example within our sample there were two couples that had been married in El Salvador previous to their migration. In these two instances, the husband was the first to migrate to the US. After settling into a job and an apartment set up by a relative or a *conocido* (close friend) who had arrived earlier, the husband would then save money to send home to his family so that they could eventually join him in the US.

In the one such family, Roberto was the first to leave for the US. Through the help of his acquaintances here in Boston, he was able to secure a job in a restaurant at Government Center. After two years of working, he had saved enough money to send home to El Salvador in order to bring his wife and two children here. Although this was

the case within many married families, many single people, men and women, immigrated to the US during this period as well. Most interesting was the discovery that many single women emigrated from El Salvador alone without the accompaniment of a male relative, spouse, or boyfriend. One of the narrators, Alma, noted that although her father had some concerns about her migration, she still journeyed alone to the US,

Mi papa. No quería que yo viniera acá. Porque como dicen que en el camino, que le pasan muchas cosas a uno, corre peligro, puede correr hasta la muerte uno allí...y el no quería que viniera para acá...mmm hum, pero aquí estoy.

My dad. He did not want me to come here. Because he knew on the way here, many things can happen, it is dangerous,(it can cause one their life)... he did not want me to come here...but here I am. (Personal Interview 10/29/03).

This gendered pattern of migration that we observe here was also noted by Terry Repak in his book Waiting in Washington. Repak remarks that "...over two-thirds of the women interviewed claimed to have made the decision to emigrate on their own, without the collaboration or assistance of male partners or fathers" (Repak 19). This is a noteworthy observation given the prevailing *machista* society in El Salvador, which many of our narrators described.

It is important to reiterate the integral role of family and social networks in the migration process. Alma describes this important role of her *conocido* (close friend); because of his financial assistance she had the opportunity to come here, he also found her a place to live and other basic services,

[E]l ya tenía unos amigos con quien el vivía. Y fuimos a vivir allí a su apartamento de sus amigos. Allí el me tenía un cuarto, y ropa, y ya me tenía todo listo [ya tenía un] trabajo...mmm hum.

My friend already had friend whom with he lived. We went to live there in an apartment with his friends. There he had (a room for me) for me a room, clothes, a job, he had every(thing) ready for me (Personal Interview 10/29/03).

An important, common experience shared by many of our narrators during their first years in the US, was their housing arrangements which placed several people into one small apartment. This was highly attractive to many of our narrators because it allowed them the ability to lessen the burden of costly rents. Sharing the rent with several different families was extremely more cost-effective than paying the rent by oneself. Although this provided them with an appealing economical solution, there were social disadvantages to this living arrangement, especially once families began to reunite.

Roberto describes his first living arrangement, which was set up by his brother as a community of several Salvadoran men, including his brother, in a small apartment in Cambridge. He spoke of the difficulty of life without his family and about the amount of drinking that existed within this community; this was a social activity that he had not encountered in his life in El Salvador. When his wife arrived, they continued to live in this same apartment with the other Salvadoran men. Roberto, however, moved from a shared bedroom to the kitchen in order to be with his family. This situation was very hard for Roberto's family as there was constant commotion in the kitchen. For example, Roberto left for work around five am and returned in the early night; others living in the house started their jobs later in the day, and would return to the house around two am. This created a disturbance in the kitchen when they returned from work because they would have to turn on the light in the kitchen, and cook their meals, disrupting Roberto's family as they slept. Eventually, however, Roberto and his family came to be the sole tenants of that apartment, which provided the family with great relief and much more privacy. This pattern of change from multi-person occupancy of a living situation to occupancy by a single family is illustrated by Roberto's experience.

Roberto's experience is very similar to the community where Luis, a young Salvadoran man first settled. Luis describes his first living arrangement in Boston,

Viví en una casa con diez muchachos en un apartamento de tres cuartos...eran solo muchachos solteros...de 15 – 20 años.

I lived in a 3-bedroom apartment with 10 guys...mostly they were single guys around 15-20 years old (Personal Interview 10/16/03).

Luis continued to note that the transition from a family community in El Salvador to this community of single young men in the US was a very hard transition for many. The amount of responsibility each man had grew greatly. Home life for the men was difficult, as this was the first time in their life that they were *independiente* (independent). They had never had to cook, clean, or wash their clothes on their own before; and many did not know how to accomplish these household tasks. In El Salvador their female relatives, such as their moms or sisters, had always taken care of these tasks.

Luis explained that many compensated for this by dating women who would take on these responsibilities. These relationships Luis observed were,

Es mas una unión por conveniencia [la renta y ayuda con las cosas de la casa que el hombre no esta acostumbrado a hacer]...por eso buscan pareja muy pronto.

It is a relationship based on convenience, [to have someone else to split the rent with, to help with household responsibilities which many men were unaccustomed to] this is why they find a girlfriend quickly (Personal Interview 10/16/03).

It is important here to note that many of these men were unaware of the great burden of domestic responsibilities. They were totally inexperienced in household matters as this was the first time they were independent of their female relatives who commonly took these tasks. Finding girlfriends to help them with these responsibilities, as Luis points out, would alleviate the burden of these chores and would also help economically in terms of the rent. Luis' depiction portrays how economically efficient these relationships

were and more importantly how gendered the domestic responsibilities were in El Salvador, a significant point we will return to many times in our report.

After settling into Somerville, our narrators still felt a deep connection to El Salvador and to their families there. They expressed this connection through remittances to El Salvador both in the financial and social sense. All of the ten narrators continue to send money, when possible, back home to El Salvador to their families. This, in fact, is an incredible trend found within the larger Salvadoran community, “Salvadorans living and working in the United States are the very reason why the Salvadoran economy has not completely collapsed. In 2002, family remittances topped 2 billion dollars in El Salvador, constituting the most important source of income” (www.cpresente.org). This trend is significant as it provides a further symbol of the great tie many Salvadorans still feel to their *patria* after immigrating the US.

Many of our narrator’s were among the first to come to Somerville in the early 1980’s, and since then many have helped several of their family members and friends to join them in the US. Roberto’s family is an excellent example of this social interconnectedness and interchange. Roberto first came to Boston through the help of his brother; as mentioned previously his brother helped Roberto settle here by finding him a place to live and a job. With this job, Roberto was able to bring his wife, Rosa, and their two small children to the US. After establishing themselves here, Roberto and Rosa had two more children. In the last two years, Roberto’s family has brought Rosa’s niece to Somerville. The niece, Ana Hilsia, continues to live with the Flores family, and has added another new member to their family, her son who is now two-months old. This is

a great example of how families maintain their strong bond to one another even though thousands of miles separate them.

In addition, families also remain close through weekly telephone calls, letters, and, if possible, visits to the *patria*. Marco's family is one that has had the opportunity of visiting El Salvador quite frequently. Marcos maintains that the deep connection his family feels to El Salvador is fostered through these frequent visits. The connection has become so inherent in his family that his children prefer Salvadoran culture to American culture. They like Salvadoran food, *la comida criolla*, better than American food, and they prefer the Salvadoran childhood lifestyle. In El Salvador they feel free as they are able to run around and play with animals in *la calle* (the street), an aspect of living which is totally missing from their urban American childhood experience. Marcos fears that this mentality could generate a culture clash for them. Marcos, in order to prevent this, reminds his children often that while it is important to keep in touch their Salvadoran roots, they must balance both cultures as they are living in the US and are American citizens. Also, Marcos and his wife recognize this tension in dealing with their children. They stress while it is important for them to value the Salvadoran culture, they still must live in the American way of life (Personal Interview 10/31/03). This example is quite significant as it provides an example of one family's intense bonding with the *patria*. It also demonstrates one possible relationship between a first generation Salvadoran family and their country of origin.

As one can see the established network of support which all of our narrators experienced made it easier for them to facilitate transition into the new American culture. This network also helped and will continue to help friends and family who decide to

immigrate. Predominant factors in the transition are finding employment and housing. Our narrators note that these predominant factors and the actual migration are highly gendered issues. It is significant to see how gender norms and values from El Salvador are manifested into this transition and the new American culture. Lastly, the bond to El Salvador is a very significant aspect to the lives of our narrators. This bond highlights parts of the Salvadoran culture, which are essential to our narrators and their family and are perpetuated in their American experience.

Chapter 2: Changes In The Work Structure

In the previous section, we discussed many cultural challenges, which Salvadorans experience on arriving in the US. A further significant challenge centers on differences between the structure of work in El Salvador and that of the US. In El Salvador, generally speaking, our narrators reported to us that the men in the family were usually the ones to leave to work outside the home. When we asked who maintained the family, many of our female narrators told us that their fathers and/or brothers upheld the family financially. As we came to understand the work structure of El Salvador better, we discovered that while the men worked outside the home financially supporting the family, the women worked inside the home maintaining the family household through important jobs such as childcare, cooking, and cleaning. These tasks were such a great responsibility that often times when daughters reached a certain age they left school to help their mothers with these responsibilities.

Ana Hilsia depicts this well; she lived with her parents, and four brothers and three sisters. Her father was their main economic support as he worked outside the home, and often her older brothers would help by working in at a *taller* (mechanical shop) also outside the home. Ana Hilsia is the oldest of the daughters in the family therefore she was expected to stay at home and help her mother with domestic chores, including the care of her younger siblings. She stopped attending school after the sixth grade and worked in the home with her mother until she decided to leave El Salvador (Dos Santos Interview Report #4). The essential role of women is evident through Ana Hilsia's story; with Ana

Hilsia's help, her mother was able to raise her seven children and maintain the family household.

It became clear to us that while many of the women had onerous responsibilities in the household many of them did not refer this initially as *trabajo*, work. It seems that many were applying *trabajo* to the more formal economy of working outside the home. Once we explained this misunderstanding in meaning, we were able to understand the full nature of their household duties, and our narrators were better able to express how they felt about their work. Alma briefly depicts the responsibilities she had in El Salvador and also conveys her attitude towards them,

En mi casa era todo, todas las responsabilidades desde que era pequeña desde los nueve años empezaba a ayudar a mi mama a lavar la ropa, que cocinar, que planchar, que a todo.

In my house I did everything, (I had) all of the responsibilities since I was very small, around 9 years old I began to help my mom to wash the clothes, to cook, to iron, with everything (Personal Interview, 10/25/03).

Alma again like Ana Hilsia, portrays the essential role and core value of woman in the maintenance of the home and also expresses her awareness that women, in this case Alma and her mother, are the dominant figure in the household domain.

Although there were women who worked outside the home in El Salvador, our narrators informed us that many of these jobs were still within the realm of "women's jobs" and some were part of the informal economy. Some examples of these jobs include sewing, working in a *paneria* (bakery), selling crafts and food on the streets. The women in these examples were indeed working outside the home, but the jobs they took seem to reflect very closely the jobs they had inside the home. These occupations represent an extension of their domestic responsibilities.

Upon arrival to the US it is interesting to note the shift our female narrators made from the informal economy of El Salvador to the formal one in the US. While some remained within the informal economy of the US-cooking, cleaning, babysitting, selling bread at church, sewing (Martin-Cooley, Interview Reports, 10/5/03)-other women ventured outside this realm into other labor sectors. While we did not dwell on this point in length in our interviews, many of our narrators commented on the ease of obtaining a job here; Ana Hilsia continued further, expressing her relief that higher education was not mandatory in finding employment,

...pero aquí en EEUU no es necesario que uno tenga diploma para poder trabajar, puede trabajar limpiando o como donde yo trabajo [Tello's Retail]...y puedes ser uno independiente de su propio esposo, y de su familia...".

Here in the US it is not necessary for one to have a [high school] diploma to be able to work, one can work cleaning, or where I work [at Tello's Retail] and one can be independent from their husband and their family (Personal Interview, 10/25/03).

This represents a dramatic change from El Salvador; Ana Cecilia mentioned in the first section, it seems that even the educated had great problems finding work in El Salvador.

In the US all of our narrators were able to find a job, and it is also necessary that both men and women work side by side equally. There are some exceptions, such as women who are raising many children, where work outside the home is impossible, but generally our narrators of both sexes worked outside the home.

With this opportunity to work outside the home, women are for the first time able to financially support their families. This achievement often brings a new sense of pride and freedom to these women. Ana Hilsia described this feeling as she remembers the first time she received a paycheck and was able to send money back home to her family in El Salvador.

Fue bien diferente y nuevo para mi porque yo nunca había trabajado en El Salvador, siempre fue en la casa, ayudando mi mama, nunca había trabajado, nunca había trabajado saliendo afuera...Se sentía diferente que estuviera trabajando, como cuando también recibí mi primer cheque fue [giggles]...bien diferente, eh...me sentí bien, bien feliz porque nunca me habían dado un cheque por mi trabajo. Pues mis hermanos me daban dinero y esas cosas, pero nunca había agarrado algo por mi trabajo. Y me sentí bien que ya podía ayudar a mi familia, mi mama, como ellos siempre me habían dado todo, y me ayudaron.

It was very different and new for me because I had never worked in El Salvador, I was always in the house helping my mom, I had never left to work outside the home. I felt different when I began working, when I received my first check, it was different, I felt good, very happy because never before had I received a (check/money) (My brothers would give me money and things like that, but I had never gotten) something for my work. I felt good because now I am able to help my family, my mom, like they had always helped me, and now I help them (Personal Interview, 10/25/03).

The women no longer have to depend on their male relatives for financial support.

This leads them to experience a new feeling of independence and freedom. Many of our narrators expressed that with this new economic independence, women are able to leave unhappy situations with male counterparts and do not have worry about being able to financially maintain their family. Many also mentioned that in addition to the opportunity to work, the state also provides good benefits to single women with families, a social service which is not available in El Salvador. This represents a dramatic break with the economic structure in El Salvador; women no longer must depend on men for any type of financial support. Ana Hilsia states,

Desde que me embarace y todo yo he estado independiente de el [padre de su hijo]. No he recibido ayuda de el, ahora tengo a mi hijo también, y no he recibido ayuda de el. Y si se puede [estar independiente], no es como en El Salvador, aquí se puede vivir así independiente del marido. No necesariamente necesita un hombre para salir adelante...allá las mujeres casi nunca trabajan, siempre son los hombres que están trabajando.

Ever since I got pregnant I have been independent of the father of my son. I had never received help from him, and now I have my son and I still do not receive help from him. Here I can be independent; it is not like it is in El Salvador. Here one can live independently of their husband. It is not necessary to have a man to get ahead...there in El Salvador, the women almost never work [outside the

home], it is always the men who are working [outside the home] (Personal Interview, 10/25/03).

Although these women now have the ability and are joining the workforce beside their male counterparts, many are still expected to maintain the household with the same intensity that they had in El Salvador and without the help of male partners. Many of our narrators have felt the difficulty of this dual role as both the breadwinner and the homemaker. In some situations this double role is unavoidable, such as the case in many female-headed households. In other families, which are headed by both males and females, there is still an expectation that women solely bear the responsibility of the household. Alma portrays this situation through the expectation of her former partner,

...estuve acompañada pero vivir así, es vivir en pecado. No tiene tiempo uno ni para respirar. ¡Sale del trabajo a coger su hijo, llega a casa, cansado, y a veces el papa de los hijos esta en casa mirando televisión, la casa desorganizada, no hay que comer, y uno llega a cocinar, a recoger la casa, y a darle de comer al marido también! ¡Eso no es correcto! ¡Eso no esta bien! ¡Esos son hombres machistos!

When I was living with my son's father, it was very hard. One did not have the time to breathe. When I left work, I picked up my son, arrived at the house, tired, and sometimes my sons' father was in the house watching the TV, the house was disorganized, there was no food prepared, I had to cook, pick up the house, and give my husband something to eat as well! This is not correct! It is not ok! They are *machistos* (Personal Interview, 10/29/03).

Many of our narrators were very aware of their *double trabajo* (double job) and expressed quite vehemently that this male attitude toward household responsibilities was unjust.

One of our male narrators expressed that he too is aware of the *double trabajo* which women experience and strives to share the household workload more equally with his partners. Marcos states that within his own family, both he and his wife have learned

to share the household responsibilities, and this in turn allows the couple to be more supportive of each other (Personal Interview, 10/31/03).

As mentioned previously, it is very difficult for some mothers to work because they have too many responsibilities at home. Emma, a mother of six children, expressed this frustration with a special emphasis on her role as the sole caretaker of the children.

...los adoro mucho y los quiero, son mis hijos y eso es todo mi querer... Esa es mi experiencia, ha sido mas peor porque yo solo yo me he dedicado a ellos, solo yo. Mi esposo nada mas porque trabaja trae el dinero a la casa, y eso es todo...Pero el que anda en todo, todo, todo, soy yo, para el hospital, para la clínica, para la escuela, solamente yo, solamente yo, solo yo... El solo a trabajar. Es todo... No he podido trabajar, entre rato digo "¿conseguiría un trabajo de noche?" Pero digo yo en eso despiertan los niños y me buscan, ¿que voy a hacer? Que ellos como solo [están] conmigo, el papa casi no, que "mami tal cosa" entonces [yo digo] "no". Voy a esperar a que crezcan, mejor.

...I adore and love them, they are my children and they are all that I want and love...This is my experience, it has been worse because I, only I have dedicated myself to them [the children], only me. My husband is not dedicated because he works to bring money home and this is it...But the one that is involved in everything, everything, everything is me, to the hospital, to the clinic, to school, just me, just me, only...He [her husband] only works. This is it...I have not been able to work, every once in awhile I say "why don't I find a night job?" But then I say to myself what if the children wake up in the night and come looking for me, what am I going to do? Because they are only with me, and with their dad almost never, because "mommy this, mommy that", so I say to myself "no" [I shouldn't hold a night job]. It would be better if I wait until they are older (Personal Interview, 10/4/03).

Although many of narrators expressed their frustration with the *double trabajo* (dual responsibility) and with being the sole care-taker of the children, our narrators, both single mothers and mothers with partners, were equally enthusiastic about their parenting role. Their critique of their male partners' expectations of them, in many cases, held the hope that in the future they would be able to depend on their male counterparts for more social and household support.

Women, who were not working at the time of interview, expressed the hope to join the workforce and contribute financially to their families. Emma conveyed this hope to us in her interview; as mentioned previously after her children are older, she would like to work outside the home again. This seems to be a common theme in mothers who have many children and, for this reason, are unable to a time to work outside the home. Rosa explained that she used to be in this situation, but now that her children are older, she is able to work.

[S]i, ahora si trabajo porque ellas [sus hijas] están grandes...ya Ester [su hija mayor] cuida a la mas pequeña...como hay que trabajar para pagar la renta y todo eso, pero que se siente mas mejor uno...se siente mejor uno trabajando, y, y estar acá en vez de irse a El Salvador donde uno pasa pobreza.

Now I work because the girls are older...Ester [her oldest daughter] looks after the younger one...because one has to pay the rent and everything else, but it makes one feel better about themselves...one feels better to be working, and to be here instead of in El Salvador where there is much poverty (Personal Interview, 10/5/03).

Others of our narrators were able to continue working full-time and have children. They accomplished this by depending on extended family and *conocidos* to watch over their children while they were at work. Ana Cecilia described this as she recalled inviting her mother up from El Salvador to live with her family and help her with child-rearing.

Hasta cuando el (niño) tuvo ocho meses, entonces comencé a trabajar otra vez. Pero, para ese entonces, me...este, mi mama se vino conmigo. Se vino cuando él tenía como seis meses, entonces ya yo mi fui a trabajar...Y ella cuidaba a mis hijos, gracias a eso yo he podido trabajar por un tiempo

When he [her son] was eight months, I began to work again. (But by that time) Because of this, my mom came [from El Salvador] to live with us. She came when he was six months, so I went to work...And she took care of my children; thanks to this I was able to work during this time (Personal Interview, 10/19/03).

Mothers, who did not have the help of extended family help, depended on *conocidos* who could also watch their kids for free. This was often a more difficult

situation in many ways. For example sometimes, as Alma describes it, *conocidos* would often live very far away from the mother's home and place of work,

Muy pesado, me tocaba que salir a dejarlos, a mi hijo a donde lo cuidaban. Yo vivía aquí en Somerville y...lo tenía que llevar a Malden que luego a Everett y así anduve en varios lugares.

It was very hard, I had to drop them off at my friend's so they could take care of them. I lived here in Somerville, and I had to take them to Malden, and later to Everett as I was [working] in different places (Personal Interview 10/29/03).

As mentioned previously, many of our narrators stated that they were very happy to have the ability to work outside the home. One of narrators, Ana Cecilia, felt that this economic independence from men and from the family greatly empowers women,

[Y]o pienso que la mujer se siente mas...como...realizada. Pienso...porque si, porque tiene también ese mismo derecho, de poder trabajar, y poder ayudar así igual que lo hace el hombre.

I think that women feel more...fulfilled/ empowered. I think...because they have the same right to work, to help the same as a man (Personal Interview 10/19/03).

Although this empowerment is a significant achievement, our narrators again commented on the burden of their *double trabajo* which was not as present in El Salvador. Alma mentioned this again,

Bueno, aquí se hace las dos cosas. Aquí en este país yo creo es más, más duro porque se hace más cosas. Hay que salir a trabajar afuera, hay que cuidar los niños, y hay que atender la casa. Son más, más trabajos...mmm hum.

Well, here one has to do two things. Here in this country, I think it is more, more difficult because one has more things to do. One must work outside the home, take care of the children, and attend to the household. There are more, more jobs (Personal Interview, 10/29/03).

Our field research corresponded with the findings of Repak in his book Waiting in Washington. Repak maintains that "women attain far more independence and freedom in the US...they pay dearly for these rights by having to work harder than they did at home...juggling full-time work with family responsibilities" (Repak 20).

Despite the struggles many of female narrators experience in meeting the demands of full-time work while at the same time meeting the expectations of their family, when asked if it is worth the effort their answer was full of optimism and enthusiasm:

C: *Usted cree que vale la pena todo ese trabajo?*

A: *Claro!*

C: Do you believe that it is worth all this work?

A: Of course (Transcription, Personal Interview, 10/29/03)!

Men and women alike faced many challenges on moving to the US. Many experienced changes from their previous employment; many who had worked in agriculture now found employment in industrial settings, some who had managerial positions now found employment only in the service sector. Despite these shifts in employment which placed some our narrators on the higher and some on the lower end of the social hierarchy, they were still grateful for their lives in the US. Roberto described his gratitude for his new life in the US in an eloquent and moving fashion in the conclusion of his interview (Personal Interview 10/12/03). Our narrators both male and female clearly acknowledged the difficulties involved in making the cultural adaptations and the transition to the work structure. However, each of our narrators accepted these hardships with great determination and optimism.

Chapter 3: Male and Female Relationships - Definitions of Family

Family Structure in El Salvador

Throughout the personal-history narratives we collected, the participants depicted similar images of the family unit in El Salvador. The narrator's descriptions fit the stereotype of a traditional family; each comes from two-parent households with many siblings, where division of labor is separated by gender. Often the grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, live within the same household or in neighboring villages, or *pueblos*. Within the homes the women fulfill the domestic role and all private matters of the household, while men financially support the family and control the public sphere. Ester was born and lived in Santa Ana, El Salvador until she was 22 years old with her parents, older brother and three older sisters. Her family description is one such typical Salvadoran family structure. She, her sisters, and her mother maintained the household while her brother and father worked outside the home in the *campos* or fields (agricultural work). Her family lived in the countryside, a ways away from the major city where they went for groceries and other basic necessities. Within the household, the females took care of the domestic responsibilities including, cooking, cleaning, laundry, and caring for young children. Ester also mentioned that occasionally her two older sister would travel to the city and sell things of their own on the streets as part of the informal economy, however her brother and father were the primary economic support for the family (Dos Santos, Interview Report 11/10/03).

Our narrators' family descriptions also characterize the values and norms of families in El Salvador, depicting couples with a tendency to marry young with plans to

quickly start new families. The woman is expected to be virtuous and chaste until marriage and both men and women are expected to be faithful to their spouses upon marriage. Furthermore, many of our participants describe the couple's children to symbolize the family's most priceless quality. The more children a family has the more value and importance they bring to the family as a whole. Emma is one such case where despite being separated from her first children born in El Salvador, she continued to have more and start an additional family while in the United States. In general, most of the participants described a cultural understanding that one's family, both immediate and extended is the most highly valued and respected aspect of one's life, regardless of the social or economic conditions each family must face.

Any form of migration, whether internal or external, inevitably causes both short and long term strains on the families involved. For Salvadoran immigrants, the migration process across national and cultural boundaries is a physically, mentally, and emotionally draining experience. Not only is the destination point geographically distant from their home country, but the new cultural environment they immerse themselves is also dramatically distant from that with which they are familiar. In the case of the ten families who shared their stories, a variety of patterns surfaced portraying the shifts in family structure that occur upon migration. Among these ten Salvadoran families we found a combination of four specific circumstances that we define as family, including everything from a traditional sense of family to radically new living arrangements for Salvadorans. These alternative family patterns are due to a combination of new socio-economic pressures faced in the U.S. and changes in perspectives on gender roles after migration. In the stories and experiences our ten narrators' stories shared we observed patterns of

family structure among couples married in the U.S. versus El Salvador with children born in either country, informal couples not legally married but sharing children, and single parenthood-specifically motherhood.

Married Couples Coming From El Salvador

One of the first patterns of family definitions we noticed focused on families previously established in El Salvador before deciding to emigrate. Emma, Rosa and Roberto all noted that it was the men, the husbands, fathers, and principle breadwinners, who made the first migration. They left behind their wives and children in their home villages under the care of members of their extended family in an attempt to establish themselves in the U.S. on their own. The consequences of separating the family across a tremendous geographic space are many. Emma, for example, followed her husband to the United States three years later but was forced to leave behind her four children with her parents. In the past ten years that she has been living in the U.S. she has only been able to bring one of her sons to the United States (McGovern, Interview Report 10/04/03). Families are separated for an indefinite amount of time creating mental and emotional strains on the disconnected family unit that only adds to the pressures of adapting and adjusting to a new way of life in a foreign country. Emma's story portrays the painful circumstance that led to her making the decision to leave behind her own children. She described how she remembers leaving her oldest son when he was just a baby, and now that she is reunited with him as an adolescent she hardly knows him as a person. She lost the opportunity to see the four children she left with her parents in El Salvador grow up (Personal Interview, 10/04/03).

Often the challenges of separating the family for an extended period of time creates permanent rifts or divides in the family, especially considering the new living conditions most men face when they arrive alone. Roberto and Luis both described the initial situations of husbands or young single men who arrive independently of their families. When Luis arrived in East Boston he lived with group of ten men in small apartment. Most of the men were between the ages of 15-20, had no family in the U.S., and most were *solteros*, or single (McGovern, Interview Report 10/16/03). As is the case for most newly arrived immigrants, survival depends on the social networks one used to reach their destination and then those made upon arrival. Through these connections immigrants tend to find themselves in cramped living arrangements, either all male or with multiple families in one small apartment.

It is not until the men have settled, found a job, and an adequate place to live that they start saving money in order to reunite their family still waiting in El Salvador. The time-frame for this first reunification varies, but among these ten families the wives and children began the migration process relatively soon after their husbands arrived, approximately one to two years later. However, due to the growing prices for helping relatives cross the border without legal documentation, some families can not afford to bring their wives and children all at once. In Ana Hilsia's opinion, it is better for the migrant family to come together from a family unit already established in El Salvador. The companionship helps in the transition process and in overcoming the challenges most new immigrants face. However, often families can not afford to come all at once and as a result they are temporarily separated, or children are left behind to the care of their grandparents (Dos Santos, Interview Report 10/25/03).

Our narrators also mentioned that this indefinite separation puts pressure on the individual adults to find alternative ways of supporting themselves or their children economically and socially. At times either the husband in the U.S. or the wife still in El Salvador may find a new partner and start an entirely new family. Both Luis and Marcos discuss the effects of new girlfriends and boyfriends of recently arrived immigrants or of women and families left behind in El Salvador. Luis offered us his own opinion from his observations among the community of men he initially lived with. Often even the men who had wives and family in El Salvador would also form a casual relationship with young Salvadoran girlfriend. These situations were particularly burdensome for the men because instead of having to maintain one family, they would have to financially take care of two, one in the U.S. and one in El Salvador. Luis believes that many of the women in El Salvador knew that their husbands were having affairs in the U.S., but were willing to ignore the situation as long as their husbands were sending money home to support their children still in El Salvador (McGovern, Interview Report 10/16/03).

For the most part, it is among couples that come married from El Salvador where “traditional” family structures and gender roles are maintained. Both Emma and Rosa describe how their families, once reunified after a couple of years, returned to the structure that they once had in El Salvador. Rosa talks about how she had to return to the domestic role because they simply could not afford to pay for a luxury such as childcare in order for both her and her husband to financially support the family,

El [su esposo] ya tenia trabajo, entonces yo no trabaje, porque tenia las dos niñas. Si una trabaja ya con dos niños es nada lo que yo ganaba para pagar [una babysitter] ...entonces no quizo [su esposo] que trabajara...porque era muy difícil trabajar [con familia]

He [her husband] already had a job, so I did not work, because I had two young girls. If one works, already having two children, it is not enough to pay [a

babysitter] ... therefore, he [her husband] did not want me to work... because it was too difficult to work [with a family to care for] (Personal Interview, 10/05/03).

Emma instead describes a situation in which she initially began by working outside the home to help her husband and herself get by. However, upon having children her husband said that she should stay at home because, “*Nadie puede cuidar a los niños como tu*”, “No one can care for the children like you can” (Personal Interview, 10/04/03). This led to her staying at home, having four more children, and thus adding to the number of responsibilities for her inside the home within the domestic mother-wife role,

...Esa es mi experiencia, ha sido mas peor porque yo solo yo me he dedicado a ellos [los niños], solo yo...Pero el que anda en todo, todo, todo, soy yo, para el hospital, para la clínica, para la escuela, solamente yo, solamente yo, solo yo. Entonces le digo yo, “yo soy como que si yo fuera la mama y el papa para ellos porque solo yo estoy entendida con ellos, solo yo”. Asi me dicen en la escuela, ¿no? “¿Al papa no lo vemos?”, es que el no se ocupa de esto...

...This is my experience, it has been worse because I, only I have dedicated myself to them [the children], only me...But, the one that is involved in everything, everything, everything is me, to the hospital, to the clinic, to school, just me, just me, only me. And so I say, “It is as if I were the mom and the dad for them because only I understand them [does most of the interacting with the children], only I do”. That is what they say to me at school, right? “The dad, we don’t see him?” that’s because he is not involved in this ... (Personal Interview, 10/4/03).

With other families who succeed in reuniting and attempt to establish a new life for themselves in the U.S., accepting of an entirely new set of values and norms gives way to various complications in terms of miscommunication and misunderstandings, particularly between spouses. Our narrators did not hesitate to admit that it is not a rare occurrence to see Salvadoran immigrant families end in separation or divorce. Often the difficulty of understanding a new culture puts pressure on men, women, and their understanding of gender roles. Many of our narrators discussed how the “new freedoms” for both men and women are the primary cause of conflict within families. Marcos

provides detailed examples of how these new freedoms are interpreted by Salvadoran men and women. He began by explaining that in El Salvador it is understood that the woman is the man's companion and men do not recognize women's freedom because of a *machista* culture that creates "unsympathetic perspectives of women's liberation" more so than in the United States (McGovern, interview report 10/31/03). In his opinion, Salvadoran women upon arriving in the U.S. have less social and cultural restrictions on their gender role behavior and often they leave their families to explore these new found freedoms. Marcos elaborates by portraying some women as having no control of their new independence. These are women who will go out partying, drinking, smoking, using drugs, finding new or younger lovers and they will leave their kids behind, forcing families to fall apart (Personal Interview, 10/31/03).

Ester also discusses these freedoms, but interestingly enough with a different perspective from that of Marcos. She argues that for women the United States offers the ability to be more independent and have more power within a household. In her opinion, life in the U.S. is "*un poco mas liberal, para la mujer y para el hombre...*", "a little more liberal, for women and for men" (Personal Interview, 11/10/03). She agrees with Marcos in that because the U.S. is more liberal of a country than El Salvador, separation and divorce are a much more common solution to family conflicts. But, she thinks it is also common for the men to be the ones to leave their wives and children for new, younger women they meet here (Dos Santos, Interview Report 5). In Ester's own words,

...muchos hombres dicen, "yo no quiero la guerra" y se van con otra y lo dejan a uno. En el país de nosotros es más diferente. Allá el hombre y la mujer se hacen. "No, yo tengo que aguantar a este hombre por mis hijos", y aquí muchas mujeres dicen "yo no voy a aguantar a este hombre por mis hijos, yo trabajo, el trabaja" entonces que aquí es independiente su vida.

...many men say, "I don't want to argue" and they go off with another woman or they leave you. In our country it is different. There a man and a woman are united, "No, I have to endure this man for my children", and here there are many women who say, "I *won't* endure this man for my children, I work, he works" and so here one has an independent life (Personal Interview, 11/10/03).

This perspective clarifies how these new freedoms give women as much right as men to leave family situations that are potentially detrimental, especially where children are concerned. If either partner abandons the family or commits adultery neither the man nor the women will feel obligated to remain, endure or *aguantar* such a living situation.

Others, such as Alma offer yet another alternative perspective. In her opinion, "*he visto las parejas que si duran por un tiempo y, ... luego se terminan*", "I've seen couples that last for some time and, ... then they break up" (Personal Interview, 10/29/03) because women like herself come to realize the *machista* (hyper-masculine) attitude in men's perceptions of gender roles and family. Although she never married in either El Salvador or the United States, she did carry on an informal relationship with the father of her children in the U.S. In this relationship she was expected to fulfill the expectations of a traditionally defined gender role. The culture she and her partner came from associate womanhood and the domestic sphere without question, and even more so if the woman is also a mother such as in Alma's case. However, due to the poor economic conditions she faced as an immigrant Alma had to take financial responsibility for her family as well.

Allá yo creo que porque el hombre trabaja y la mujer se queda en casa, nada más. Y entonces el hombre trabaja y tiene que llevar la comida a la casa y la mujer esta cocinando y limpiando la casa, cuidando los hijos, y aquí no. Aquí cada quien tiene que salir por las mañanas, o por las noches a trabajar y cuidar...y uno después tiene doble trabajo. Atender el marido, la casa, los hijos, todo...no, mucho trabajo. Es demasiado trabajo.

Over there [El Salvador] I believe that because the man works outside the home and the woman stays at home, there is no other option. Therefore, he man works and he has to bring home the food and the woman is busy cooking and cleaning the home, caring for the children, and here it is not like that. Here, everyone has to

go out during the day, or at night to work and take care [of the home/children]... Then one [a woman] has double the work. To take care of her husband, the home, the children, everything...no, it's a lot of much work. It's too much work (Personal Interview, 10/29/03).

As she describes her situation to us it becomes obvious that women coming into U.S. culture are constantly exposed to possibilities of non-traditional gender roles because of pressure coming from other aspects of their lives. It is essential for everyone to join the labor force, whether formally or informally, in order to survive paying for rent, bills, and food. This is particularly true in the case of immigrants as all of our narrators mentioned. Sharing the responsibility in order to get through the struggles of the immigrant experience makes it necessary for families to share the commitment to work both inside and outside the home. When couples cannot reach a compromise on this level, women in situations such as Alma's prefer to leave and make it on her own.

Luis discusses how tension and problems among couples are resolved by separation, often facilitated by the help of Salvadoran women who have been in the U.S. for a longer period of time. When it comes to issues of abuse, neglect, or mal-treatment, those women who have already passed through the initial challenges of the immigration process work as a support network for the younger generation. They become the teachers of an American cultural concept that is completely foreign to recently arrived females and males. Luis describes how new immigrant women come to the U.S. accustomed to the traditional female role of *aguantando* (enduring) and are introduced to a new understanding of *libertad* (freedom),

...Pero cuando vienen aca, este, son ayudadas por las mujeres que han venido antes, y si el marido la empieza a tratar mal le dicen, "aquí las cosas no son lo mismo que [en] el país de nosotros. Aquí hay leyes que te protegen. Entonces si este hombre te trata mal no tienes que aguantarle", y eso es lo que termina rompiendo los matrimonios...La libertad que esas mujeres aprenden, que la

circunstacion es diferente, que no tienen que seguir [viviendo así] al cien por ciento. Muchas familias se terminan cuando llegan.

...But when they come here, um, they are helped by women who arrived much earlier, and if the husband begins to treat her poorly they tell her, “Things are not the same here as they are in our country. There are laws here that will protect you. So, if this man is treating you poorly you don’t have to put up with him”, and that is what ends up breaking up marriages...The freedoms that these [recently arrived] women learn, that the circumstances here are different, that they no longer have to continue [living like this] 100 percent. Many families fall apart after they arrive [in the U.S.] (Personal Interview, 10/16/03).

Upon realizing and understanding that they do not need to *aguantar* anymore, they are encouraged to empower themselves by taking hold on their own independence. Luis believes that Salvadoran women come to recognize and demand their own rights as they are exposed and influenced by their new cultural environment. According to Luis, it is then this *libertad de las mujeres* (women’s freedom) that leads to the incidence of separation or divorce.

Shifts in the divisions of labor particularly the need to work outside the home, expose women to the opportunities available outside the realm of the domestic sphere. Most immigrant women want to take advantage of the freedoms and liberal environment that life in the U.S. offers them, but their husbands have a difficult time accepting these changes. For some men it is as if they are being challenged by their wives who are refusing to maintain a “traditional” sense of the family now that they are open to new lifestyles and attitudes. Our narrators agree that it is more difficult for men who bring their families to the U.S. than men who establish their families in the U.S. to accept these new cultural ideas, or to attempt to compromise and blend them with their traditions. Ana Cecilia touched on Luis’ idea of *la libertad de las mujeres* when she mentioned in one of her responses that women feel more *realizadas* (fulfilled/empowered) upon opening themselves up to the new opportunities in the United States,

Tal vez el hombre que viene... ha tenido su hogar, verdad, en El Salvador por muchos años y viene aca... Si, les cuesta aceptar ese cambio de vida. Y muchos no los aceptan. Pero, cuando sea una que empieza su hogar aca, o sea, es más fácil....Si, porque desde luego la mujer no va a poder atender igual al esposo estando acá que como estaba allá [El Salvador]. Es completamente diferente, y creo que eso si crea tension....Yo pienso que la mujer se siente mas, como, realizada. Pienso...porque si, porque tiene tambien ese mismo derecho, de poder trabajar, y poder ayudar así igual que lo hace el hombre. Entonces allá no, uno tiene que...aguantar, quizas. Es verdad, aceptar todo lo...de la otra parte [del matrimonio].

Maybe for a man who comes...having had his family, right?, in El Salvador for many years and then he come here... Yes, it's hard for them to accept this change in lifestyle. And many do not accept it. But, when it's the case of one who starts his family here, well, that makes it easier...Yes, because the woman now won't be able to take care of her husband in the same way here as she did there [in El Salvador]. It's completely different, and I think that that does create tension...I think that women feel more, like, fulfilled/empowered. I think...because yes, because they have that same right, to be able to work, and to be able to help in the same way the men do. And there [in El Salvador] no, one has to...endure, perhaps. That's true, accept [put up with] everything...of the other half [of the matrimony] (Personal Interview, 10/19/2003).

In discussing women's shifts in their understanding of gender roles Ana Cecilia points to the fact that many women come to recognize that they no longer need to *aguantar* (endure). As this realization process occurs it completely turns families upside down as they struggle to accept the changes. When asked about the shifts in family structure after migration, Ana Cecilia describes that there are varying degrees of change for Salvadoran families. In the U.S. the nuclear family is the most important, despite how geographically close one may be to his or her relatives. Salvadorans on the other hand are missing a large part of what they consider to be what makes family so important, that being all the members of one's extended family. Sometimes immigrant families must accept this American characteristic and focus only on their isolated nuclear family because they have no other relatives here except for those members of their immediate family.

Marcos provides a clear example of how two opposing cultural systems affect an immigrant family confronting these conflicts on a personal level. He describes the situation of many of the Latino immigrant families he works with and points to changing gender roles as the root of most conflicts. However, the problem he sees is not only with what causes the conflicts between couples, but how their cultural surroundings affect their options or choices for resolving the conflict. A misunderstanding of how the “American system” works and a strong tie to one’s own traditions often pushes couples towards separation or divorce. Marcos argues that in El Salvador, if conflict arises among spouses it becomes the responsibility of the entire family (both nuclear and extended) to counsel the husband and wife. Much like Ana Cecilia, he goes on to explain that American families, categorized as a nuclear family (mother, father, and children), are far more individualistic than families in El Salvador. In El Salvador a family not only consists of one’s immediate and extended families, but also extends to the greater community as well. Maintaining family unity is a priority in El Salvador for economic and social reasons that American culture is not necessarily used to (McGovern, Interview Report 10/31/03).

Consequently, divorce or separation within Salvadoran society is the absolute last resort for family conflict. Instead, the family comes to help in whatever way the couple can be helped. The problem for Salvadoran immigrant families is that in the U.S. they are lacking an enormous part of that which they consider to be their “family”. There is often very little or no extended family, and no close friends that newly arrived immigrants can confide in. Instead, U.S. culture offers professional counseling help in place of the family, and it is this option that does not appeal or make sense to Salvadoran couples.

Most recently arrived couples are not comfortable with revealing their intimate, personal problems to strangers. As a result, lack of any sort of counseling or help drives couples to separate and families to break up before the situations become worse.

Married Couples Established in the U.S.

Two of the families who participated in our research were composed of immigrants who met, married, and established their families in the United States. Ana Cecilia and Marcos' families portray this alternative to the Salvadoran immigrant family. Both individuals, as well as others who commented on this particular type of family structure, agree that immigrant families established in the United States differ significantly from those that are formed in El Salvador. The unique qualities of these families, in which usually one or both parents are immigrants while the children are all born in the U.S., contributes to how these families distinguish themselves from the other three forms of immigrant families we have identified.

The most notable and acknowledged difference by these narrators is that the degree of conflict between spouses is remarkably less. The culture clash issue that creates deep tensions and points of conflicts among recently arrived Salvadoran families has less of an impact on couples that meet and establish their families here. These families, much like Ana Cecilia and Marcos, have created a new set of norms and value for themselves and for their children that reflect a compromise between the traditions they have brought with them from El Salvador and the customs they have learned and adapted to in the United States.

To specify, changes in gender roles and the division of labor are two areas where immigrant families demonstrate their distinctiveness. It is in these households that one finds a more equal division of labor, specifically relating to work inside and outside of the home. Both Marcos and Ana Cecilia discuss how in their homes, both husband and wife work outside the home to support the family financially while at the same time they share domestic chores and care of the children. Also, while the true value of a family is still in its children, a symbol of the family's future, both Marcos and Ana Cecilia do not have as large a number of children as Rosa or Emma. This may indicate that couples who form families after migration have refocused their goals and motives for raising children. Ana Hilsia better explains this change when she compares young couples in El Salvador to one of her friends, who recently married in the United States,

Yo veo también una amiga que se caso acá y ella no tiene niños...ahora que se caso también es mas la diferencia. Y ella se caso y dice que, que tiene que tener bastante dinero, ahorrar bastante dinero porque ellos quieren comprar una casa para después tener hijos. Quizás es una buena...una buena idea. Que si se hubieran casado en El Salvador tal vez hubieran dejado hijos allá o hubieran venido con hijos ya...Es otra manera de pensar.

I also see a friend who was married here and she does not have children...now that she is married there is even more of a difference [in the type relationship]. And she got married and she says that, that he has to have a lot of money, she has to save a lot of money because they want to buy a house so that they can have children later on. Perhaps that is a good idea...a good idea. If they had been married in El Salvador maybe they would have left their children behind [in coming to the U.S.] or they would have come already [to the U.S.] with children...It's a different way of thinking (Personal Interview, 10/25/03).

Ana Hilsia's comment illustrates that couples who are married in the U.S. after the migration process develop different priorities for their futures. The woman is not necessarily expected to jump into the mother-wife role and the marriage is seen as more of a real partnership. Ana Hilsia argues the possibility that had they married in El Salvador, owning their own home and starting their family independent of their own

extended families would not have been a concern. Ana Hilsia's example as well as what we gathered in comparing our other families, identifies one of the ways in which couples formed after migrating from El Salvador tend to deal with a clash of cultural understandings. Couples come into the marriage willing and prepared to blend two opposing cultures and sets of traditional values.

In bringing together two different perspectives, both individuals are open to creating a collaborative effort within their new family environment. Instead of confronting one another to reject or demand a drastic change in their traditional perspectives, families started in the U.S. are aware of and ready for the inevitable culture clash. However, leaving El Salvador and its values as single adults, and learning to adapt to new cultural surroundings on their own gives individuals in these kinds of couples an advantage. They are capable of tackling the problems of culture conflict as a family and working through them by appreciating and finding a middle ground between two different cultures. This is not to say that such couples are more successful or better off than couples coming from El Salvador. On the contrary, each has its own advantages and disadvantages. Still, there are significant differences in the structures of these two family types and from what our informants have shared with us, there seems to be a connection between frequency of divorce and families who were separated and reunited in the migration process.

Non-Traditional Families- Informal Couples & Single Parenthood

Aside from traditional family units, there are new types of family arrangements represented in our sampling of Mystic View Salvadoran immigrants. These situations were radically different from those of the Salvadoran traditional family unit incorporating the married husband and wife with children. Two specific types of non-traditional arrangement are the basis for the family structure of many of our narrators. These two types include informal couples (those not legally married but living together with children) and single parenthood. It is because informal couples have children that we have chosen to label them as a family, or new type of family. As some of the families of this report note, informal couples with one or more children tend to lead to single-parenthood, but more specifically single-motherhood.

Luis describes in his interview that informal couples form relationships within communities of recently arrived, young immigrants. Both men and women are searching for someone to help them survive the everyday struggles of the immigrant experience. Coming from a culture in which men are not accustomed to taking on domestic responsibilities, it is especially important for them to establish an informal relationship with a woman to help alleviate the pressures of adjusting to a society quite different from their own,

Bueno, de repente te das cuenta que tu eres responsable absolutamente de todo. En la casa uno, de hombre, de El Salvador nunca lavas tu ropa, te cocinas, vienes acá y de repente ves que tienes que hacer todas estas cosas...No fue tanto problema para mi, pero para otras personas [hombres] que tienen su mamá, sus hermanas, todo eso, y están acostumbrados, entonces es difícil, es un cambio... La mayoría de hombre solteros se casan o decimos "se acompañan" ...viven juntos pero sin casarse por eso, por conveniencia...Es más una unión por conveniencia...por eso buscan pareja muy pronto...

Well, suddenly you realize that you are absolutely responsible for everything. At home, a man's home, in El Salvador you never wash your clothes, cook for yourself, [but] you come here and suddenly you see that you have to do all these things... It wasn't much of a problem for me, but for other people [men] who have their mothers, their sisters, all that, and they are used to it, it's now difficult, it's a change... The majority of single men get married or as we say they "get together" [with women]... they live together but without getting married for that reason, out of convenience... It's more of a union out of convenience... that's why they look for a partner so soon [after arriving]...(Personal Interview, 10/16/03).

Taking on new domestic responsibilities along with the challenges of finding a place to live and work are obstacles that many men have never had to face. Our narrators mentioned that immigrant women who come to the U.S. young and single are also looking for a similar sense of security within a familiar cultural setting. Women look towards these informal arrangements for financial support as they too come from a society that encourages dependence on male figures. Alma describes how this may affect a women's sense of independence,

Algunas les puedes afectar, a mi no me ha afectado el nada. Yo soy la mujer mas feliz del mundo, de la tierra, de todo el planeta! Yo me quede con mis hijos sola...Y estoy sola y soy feliz asi. Pero algunas personas no lo hacen tal vez porque tienen miedo de no sacar sus hijos adelante, que creen que si no estan con el papa de sus hijos se van a morir. Falta de valor. Eso es falta de valor, y decision. Mmm hum, y nadie se muere, nadie se muere estando solo, ¿no?
 For some it could affect them, for me it has not affected me at all. I am the happiest woman in the world, on earth, on the whole planet! I was left alone with my children ... And I am alone and I am happy like this. But some people don't do it [single-parenting] maybe because they are afraid they will not be able to come out ahead with their children, they think that if they are not with the father of their children they will die. Lack of values. That is a lack of values and decision. Mmm hum, and nobody dies, nobody dies because they are alone, right? (Personal Interview, 10/19/03).

These new families are then established out of convenience and necessity in the initial stages of the immigrant experience. Both individuals benefit from the new arrangement they choose to establish.

In describing their own situations or those of friends, our narrators make it clear that rarely are these arrangements formalized, legalized, or even permanent, even in cases where children become a part of the new family. Due to the new freedoms that both Salvadoran men and women find in the United States, and the fact that their relationship is never legalized, these couples are more likely to dissolve and move on independently. The ability to live independently in a society that will socially and financially support one's decision, particularly that of a woman, encourages many individuals to leave the family unit in situations that are not working out as expected. Thus, many informal couples established out of convenience separate for the same reasons that married couples do, but with less familial, social, or economic anxieties about re-establishing themselves as single-parent families.

The Salvadoran single mothers we interviewed come from situations in which informal arrangements encouraged a separation and all of them expressed their pride in being single parents. They show no signs of shame or resentment for having to separate from the father of their children. All recognize the role that U.S. society in general and the community have played in their ability to succeed as independent women. Each of them also discussed similar concerns and achievements as single-mothers which included taking on the double-responsibility of mother and father, working both inside and outside the home, finding childcare, and finding financial and social assistance when necessary. Ana Cecilia compares the experience of the single parent between El Salvador and the United States when she says,

En la familia, si, por ejemplo si, tiene uno mas quien... esta alguien con uno. Hay mas facilidad, aqui no lo tienen. Aqui uno se encuentra solo. Pero en cuanto a ayuda digamos del gobierno...hay mucha mas ayudas aqui, bastante. Exacto, alla no...Yo pienso que eso tiene que ver tambien en que en El Salvador la mujer

siempre se queda callada y todo porque no tiene de donde...sabe que si se queda sola va a aguantar bastante, va a pasar muchos problemas economicos. Mientras que aqui no. Aqui encuentra muchas ayudas.

In the family, yes, for example yes, one has more who ... there is always somebody with you [to help]. It's easier, but here that [the extended family] doesn't exist. One finds himself or herself alone here. But in terms of help of, let's say the government...there are many forms of help here, many. Exactly, there [in El Salvador] there is none...I think that that has to do with the fact that in El Salvador the woman always remains silent and everything because she has no where [to turn?] ... She knows that if she ends up alone she will have to deal with too much on her own, and she will come across many economic problems. Meanwhile, here that is not the case. Here one finds lots of help. (Personal Interview, 10/19/03).

In order to support their families financially, the women mention a variety of solutions or ways of finding help, besides the need to work outside the home. Some depended on the father's of the children to pay child-support regularly. Those who do not depend on the children's father receive assistance from their neighbors or relatives within the community. Ester argues that women have no need to economically depend on their husbands, boyfriends, or the fathers of their children. Since it is essential for both men and women to work outside the home in order to survive (paying rent, expenses, food, sending money home, etc), they can each take on their own responsibilities and support a family independent of one another. Other women have also used government assistance programs to help them get started independently or when the pregnancy and birth period kept them from working. Nonetheless, each one strongly stressed their need and desire to work outside the home in order to support their children. But, the need and drive to return to the work force after birth then creates challenges with regards to childcare.

The female narrators discuss that childcare could usually be found among their neighbors, acquaintances or friends. Alma tells us that while living in Somerville she never paid for childcare, but instead took her boys to the neighboring cities Malden and

Everett where *conocidos* (close friends) would watch the boys for free. With each pregnancy, she would return to work after only one month (McGovern, Interview Report 10/29/03). Those who could afford it placed their children in daycare centers or after-school programs. Nonetheless, the women we interviewed considered taking on the responsibility of raising children as independent women a privilege rather than a burden.

These single-mothers demonstrate a commitment to the double-responsibility of being both *la mama y el papa*, the mom and dad, in their families. While they recognize the challenges and admit that it makes life in the United States more difficult, these women showed a remarkable sense of security and independence that positively reinforces the change in their perspectives of gender roles and family structure. Alma enthusiastically described her situation to us,

C: ¿Y el papa de los chicos ayudo con mantenerlos?

A: No, nunca, nunca ha ayudado.

C: ¿Y entonces solamente...

A: Solamente yo, yo soy la mama y la papa.

C: ¿Y como se siente tener esa responsibilidad?

A: Ahh...me siento bien! Muy bien porque lo he sabido hacerlo hasta ahora...y me siento bien [Alma se ríe]!

C: And the father of the children, does he help take care of them?

A: No never, he has never helped.

C: And so only ...?

A: Only me, I am the mom and the dad.

C: And how do you feel about having that responsibility?

A: Ahh... I feel good! Very good because I've known how to do it up until now... and I feel good [Alma laughs]! (Transcription, Personal Interview 10/29/03).

While they may face more obstacles, life as an independent single mothers offers each one of them enough reason not to regret the decisions they made. Separating from the father of their children placed these women in a more promising and positive family atmosphere, especially for their children. Ester describes her attitude towards single-parenthood as,

... es un papel muy duro, que es responsabilidad grande de uno, ser madre y de ser padre a la misma vez, estar pendiente de la casa, de los hijos, y de todo que hace falta...y no hay otro que lo pueda hacer sino que yo... Claro, yo estoy orgullosa que en principal pues, estoy sacando mis hijos adelante, y eso es lo que les digo que ellos tienen que tomar en cuenta, de que ellos tienen todo porque yo se los dio, porque aunque sea con mis esfuerzos, aunque sea por aquí, por allá, luchando con la vida. Pero no les hace falta nada y, como yo le digo mis hijos pues, aunque sea con lo pocito que gano, pagamos renta, compramos comida, necesitan su ropa y todo, y aquí lo tienen, gracias a Dios que salimos adelante.
 ...it's a very difficult role, it's a big responsibility for one, being the mother and the father at the same time, being responsible for the home, the children, and everything that [the family] needs... and there is no one else who could do it if not me... Of course, I am proud because, well, my children are coming out ahead [succeeding], and that if what I tell them that they have to be aware of, that they had everything because I give it to them, because of my efforts [and struggles], over here or over there, fighting against life. But they have everything they need and, like I tell my children, despite how little I make, we pay rent, we buy food, they need their clothes and everything, and here they have it, thanks to God we are coming out on top (Personal Interview, 11/10/03).

She has raised her children by herself, arranged her work schedule to fit their school schedule and then returns home to cook, clean, and make sure they have everything they need. The only time Ester took off from work was while she was pregnant. She has experienced the difficulty of juggling double responsibilities, and recognizes that it is initially challenging for women to adapt to this way of life in the U.S. All the burden and pressure is placed on their shoulders alone, and in Ester's case she has very little family to rely on in Somerville. Her niece used to care for the children, but besides that she does not feel connected to the Latino community. Still, it makes her proud to know that she can independently raise her own children (Dos Santos, Interview Report 5).

Many of our interviewees also commented on how the situation they find themselves in today is one that would be next to impossible in El Salvador. The definition of family structure and gender roles is so different from that which they find in the U.S. that many of them admit that they would not be able to survive as single mothers in their

home country. Not only would they face pressure from their family to marry the father of their children or to remain in a marriage that is falling apart, but they would also face social and economic challenges that would prevent them from living independently of their families or husbands. Ana Hilsia tells us how her situation as a single mom would have been impossible in El Salvador,

Desde que me embarace y todo yo he estado independiente de el [padre de su hijo]. Y si se puede [estar independiente], no es como en El Salvador, aquí se puede vivir así independiente del marido. No necesariamente necesita un hombre para salir adelante...allá las mujeres casi nunca trabajan, siempre son los hombres que están trabajando...

Ever since I became pregnant and everything I have been independent of him [the father of her child]. And yes it is possible [to be independent], it's not like in El Salvador, here one can live like this independent of her husband. One doesn't necessarily need a man to succeed... there [in El Salvador] the women almost never work, it is always the men who work... (Personal Interview, 10/25/03).

At home in El Salvador, the only women who live independently of their families and husbands successfully raising children on their own are those with University degrees and professional careers. Women of the lower and middle-classes can not find work to support their children and therefore rely on their extended families or husbands. Ana Hilsia is proud to say that she will be able to raise her son on her own, without emotional or economic help from or dependence on the baby's father. She is confident she can handle the double responsibility of mother and main source of income, especially because she also has help from Rosa and Roberto's family. She recognizes that had her situation occurred in El Salvador it would have been in her best interest to marry the baby's father or to heavily depend on her own family that was already struggling financially (Dos Santos, Interview Report 4).

The resources offered to single mothers in the United States, many of which these woman have taken advantage of, are non-existent in Salvadoran society. Specifically, a

public assistance program that financially helps single mothers is not available; childcare programs, which are restricted to the availability of the extended family; and the unemployment rate across the country which limits the job market for females, particularly lower-class females to the informal sector. All these conditions prevent women from having the choice to succeed as independent women and single mothers. Ana Cecilia agrees that many Salvadoran women who have left their husbands have been incredibly successful as single, independent parents caring for their children. The assistance that women receive from extended family, friends, social services, and the government highly motivates and encourages women to seek their independence. In El Salvador they are taught to remain silent and endure life as only a wife and mother. Because there is no form of welfare or adequate social services in El Salvador, single mothers embracing their independence run the risk of facing greater social and financial challenges. The success rate of single female households in El Salvador could not compare to that which we observed among a small sampling of Salvadoran immigrants in the U.S. Not only are these women encouraged and supported in their single-parenthood but they are also driven to take their lives to the next level in order to improve their living conditions. Many of the single women we interviewed hope to take English classes, then education classes in order to obtain better, higher-wage jobs to improve their socio-economic status and to give their children even more opportunities for the future.

Despite the variety of family types represented by our narrators, each has found a way to succeed in a manner that best suits his or her needs. In each case, it is apparent that the family unit (adults) seeks to hold the children's interests above its own. The concern for their children reflects the decisions each man and/or woman makes with

regards to their definition of a family. Our narrators reflect the value they place on their children by deciding to: separate from one's partner to avoid conflict, share the domestic and financial responsibility in order to provide more for the family as whole, or maintain a traditional division of labor so that one's children are in the care of their own mother or father.

Chapter 4: Relationships Between Parents and Children

In the preceding section, we discussed the change many Salvadoran couples experience within male to female relationships after immigrating to the US. Another very important familial relationship, which is also affected greatly after migration, is the relationships between migrant parents and their children. Relationships between parents and their children are treasured, and parents reflected greatly on the importance of this throughout many of our interviews; all but one of our narrators was a parent. Because the other themes in our project revolved around relationships within the families, we felt it was essential that we include a special section devoted to the relationship between our narrators as parents and their children.

Immigrant families have many great obstacles to overcome; two of the most important of these are language and culture. Without the ability to speak English, communication in the US is very difficult and this is further compounded by a further difficulty in understanding a new culture. These obstacles are intensified as children of these families begin to speak the new language and engage more fully in the new culture. Parents find themselves in a precarious position of trying to balance the language and culture of the *patria* with the language and culture of the US. This situation often can create a culture gap between generations, a tension that is often manifested in difficulties around language.

In our interview with Marcos, he elaborated more on the centrality of language to culture and to communication. Language, according to Marcos, is a significant part of culture. Since language is part of culture, those who speak the language become

integrated more easily into the culture. Marcos provided us with an example of this through an illustration involving his own children. He attributes much of their connectedness to El Salvador to the fact that they are fluent in Spanish and are furthermore well versed in Salvadoran idioms. He thinks that bilingualism is very important in order for his children and all children to recognize, appreciate, fully understand, and have pride in their "*patria*" and in their Salvadoran culture.

Marcos continues by asserting that families, who do not teach their children Spanish, in addition to losing a part of their culture, also have their family intimacy and communication diminished. Children who do not speak Spanish are limited in their familial interaction to simple words such as "*si*" and "*no*", and body language; but are unable to express themselves in a more coherent fashion. Because of such language barriers, consistent communication and connection between parents and their children is difficult and sometimes almost impossible.

Many parents, according to Marcos, do not teach their children Spanish because they feel that integration into the American system is dependent on being fluent in English. With this fluency the children will adapt more easily to an American way of life and will enjoy more opportunities because of their ability to speak English without an accent. Some expressed a wish to learn English, but due to a variety of factors were unable to complete the task, and their communication is thus limited to basic phrases and body language (Interview #5 10/31/03). This limitation results in frustration involving both parents and children.

In a meeting held at the Welcome Project by Lerone Lessner and several of the AHORA students, many of the students commented on these problems in communicating

with their parents. While most of the students at this meeting were bilingual, they were still able to voice these concerns. They expressed their parents' frustration at not being able to understand English; they gave the example of speaking on the phone in English while their parents were present. Their parents will often comment that they would rather them speak in Spanish on the phone as they will be able to understand the conversation more fully. Many of the students conveyed to us that mostly Spanish is spoken in the home with their parents.

A further frustration that some of these students expressed is that, while they are bilingual, some of their younger siblings are not. These students realize that Spanish is important in terms of communication with one's family and an important part of their culture. One student went even further and mentioned that Spanish will be a great resource when she enters the job market. Because they understand the great benefits to learning Spanish they want to make sure that their younger sibling will also gain from its benefits. In an effort to help their younger siblings, the older siblings try to teach them Spanish and will insist on speaking to them in Spanish. These students appear to be most concerned with their younger sisters and brothers being able to communicate well with their family (Lesser Discussion Report).

This difficulty with the younger siblings was mentioned again in the interview with Ester. Ester conveyed to us that it is becoming harder and harder to persuade her younger children to speak, read, and write in Spanish.

Mi hijo, el grade, es bilingüe, pero ya los otros dos no, no son bilingüe pero hablan algo de español...Ellos, ellos, ellos en la casa, pues ingles hablan, yo los exijo que hablan español y, que hablan español para que ellos mantengan las dos lenguas pero es difícil, puro ingles, puro ingles porque la niña es pequeña...Tengo problemas con el mas pequeño [niño] porque el no puede escribir español.

My oldest son is bilingual, but the other two are not bilingual, but are able to speak a little Spanish. When they are in the house, they speak English, I demand that they speak Spanish, that they speak Spanish to maintain both languages; this is difficult, only English, only English [they speak] because the little one is so young...I have problems with my youngest child because he cannot write in Spanish. (Personal Interview, 11/10/03).

As mentioned previously through the experiences of Marcos, language and culture go hand-in-hand. Language, which builds culture, can also be an expression of pride, understanding, and connection to one's country. Often times we found that the children's pride in the *patria* is mirrored by the opinion of their own parents' experiences in El Salvador. For example, Ester tells her children that

[D]irectamente hasta este día no me les hablo nada del país de nosotros, les digo que el país de nosotros no es bueno, y les digo que el país de nosotros es muy pobre... [P]ues como yo no hago viaje ellos tampoco, pero no tampoco me dicen ellos "Mami yo quiero ir".

Since this day, I tell my children nothing about our country [El Salvador], I tell that that our country is not good, that it is very poor...Since I never take trips [to El Salvador] neither have they, but they also never tell me "Mommy I want to go" (Personal Interview 11/10/03).

The image she paints for her children of El Salvador could be a reason as to why her children do not want to travel to El Salvador and why they do not feel a connection to the *patria*. This then could be the rationale as to why they are reluctant to speak Spanish.

This example is, however, in sharp contrast of what Marcos relates to his children, which is mentioned previously in chapter one. Marcos recounts to his children a very different image of El Salvador one in which the Salvadoran lifestyle and childhood is highly appreciated. His family also has had the opportunity to encounter these experiences firsthand. Because of these positive memories through visits to El Salvador, and their ability to speak Spanish, Marcos' children are able to feel connected to El Salvador and have developed a very strong bond to Salvadoran culture, even more so

than their connection to American culture. This however can create a conflict as the children become more attached to their *patria* than to the country in which they are living. Marcos constantly reminds the children that although they prefer El Salvador to the US they are still living within an American system.

Raising a child can be difficult anywhere regardless of differences in language and culture. As differences in language and in culture between parents and children occur, even more clashes can arise as communication, both in the literal and metaphorical senses, becomes limited. Despite these conflicts, all of our narrators with children expressed gratitude and contentment that they are able to offer their children a better life in the US. They feel that here in the US their children will have the opportunities to lead better lives than they would in El Salvador. Many parents expressed great pride in being able to give these opportunities to their children; Ester states clearly,

Claro, yo estoy orgullosa que en principal pues, estoy sacando mis hijos adelante, y eso es lo que les digo que ellos tienen que tomar en cuenta, de que ellos tienen todo porque yo se los dio, porque aunque sea con mis esfuerzos...

Of course, I am proud because, well, my children are coming out ahead [succeeding], and that if what I tell them that they have to be aware of, that they had everything because I give it to them, because of my efforts... (Personal Interview, 11/10/03).

Like any parent across the globe, they are pleased that their children have the opportunity here to attend school and work. They want the best for their children, as put plainly by Alma,

[Y]o quisiera darles lo mejor. Lo mejor para ellos, que estudian, y que trabajen, y que sean hombres trabajadores.

I want to give my children the best. The best for them to study, to work, to be working men (Personal Interview 10/29/03).

Parents are aware of the drastic differences in opportunities from El Salvador to the US, for this reason many parents want their children to take advantage of every

opportunity they come across here in the US. They believe that much can be accomplished as long as one tries. Ana Cecilia describes this best,

Aquí tengo más posibilidades y ellos tienen más posibilidades también de lograr lo que ellos quisieran hacer. Mientras que en El Salvador si yo hubiera tenido familia en El Salvador, creo que hubiera sido con muchas mas limitaciones. Y...no se si hubiera llegado a lograr lo que quisiera con ellos porque es muy difícil la vida en El Salvador, es bien difícil. No, definitivamente aquí yo pienso que si no, si no salen adelante, si no logran ser alguien, es porque realmente no quieren, tal vez. No porque no puedan porque aquí si hay la oportunidad de poder salir adelante.

Here I have more possibilities and they [the children] have more possibilities to succeed in whatever they want to do. While in El Salvador, if I had had a family in El Salvador, I think that there would have been more limitations. I don't know how they could have been successful because life in El Salvador is hard, it is very hard. Here I think, well if one does not get ahead, or is not successful it is because in reality one did not want to get ahead, perhaps. Not because one can't, because here there is the opportunity to get ahead (Personal Interview, 10/19/03).

Cultural differences across generations significantly impact relationships between parents and their children. The difference in language and culture from El Salvador to the US is quite noticeable though this relationship. Our narrators displayed a desire for their children to hold on to their roots, particularly to their Spanish language. In the meeting with the students at the Welcome Project, it appeared that most were also in agreement with our narrators in the importance of the language and culture. Both parents and children expressed the frustrations in communication when language and cultural barriers arise. Our narrators as parents were very optimistic for their children's future here in the US. They were proud and excited that their children had more opportunities than they would have if they were in El Salvador.

Final Remarks

The four chapters in our report highlight the major themes prevalent throughout our semester-long research. Despite the diversity of topics each chapter covers, the themes are interconnected in terms of discussing the shifts in family structure and gender roles among immigrant communities. The unique perspectives of our ten narrators and their families represent only a handful of the voices of the every-day Salvadoran immigrant whose experience is often overlooked. However, their individual insight provides a wide range of parallel observations regarding the more personal and private aspects of the immigrant experience. As we bring our research and final report to a close, we would like to focus on these parallels. We will also reflect more on the limitations, weaknesses, and strengths of our research; where we found holes, what we would do differently knowing what we know now, and finally opportunities for future research.

Complete assimilation into American society and culture is not a reality for many immigrants. Breaking cultural ties from one's *patria* is particularly difficult when adult immigrants immerse themselves within an American culture so unlike the one in which they were raised. These cultural transformations from Salvadoran culture to American culture bring many changes into the lives of immigrants. The focus of our report examined these cultural transformations on the structure of the family unit. For logistical and practical reasons, shifts in gender role definitions among our ten Salvadoran narrators were inevitable at varying degrees. As our narrators stressed, it becomes an economic necessity that both men and women to work outside the home. That in itself represents a significant change in traditional Salvadoran values that determine the appropriate position of men and women in society. The variation in the division of labor leads to changes in

the understanding of gender roles. When alternative gender role perspectives are incorporated into family structure and values, we observed the creation and redefinition of the family unit among the ten narrators.

Throughout our interviews the narrators often commented on the essential role of social networks within the immigrant community. Although many of our narrators mentioned that they felt a lack of unity among the Salvadoran community, we saw otherwise. We feel that the importance of these social networks for migration indirectly points to the significance of the Salvadoran community within the Latino community as a whole. Families and *conocidos* provide immigrants with fundamental resources to survive upon arrival. No matter how limited their immediate networks are there is still an informal sense of unity of Salvadorans taking part in the migration and resettlement process.

An additional change in the values and structure of the family unit is the relationship between immigrant parents and their American children. Among our ten families with children, we observed two main patterns of parents. Immigrant parents choose between raising their children in a transnational environment where bilingualism and biculturalism thrive, or allow their children to Americanized with weak ties to their cultural background. Whether or not their children were fluent in both English and Spanish, all of our narrators stressed the importance of bilingualism within an immigrant family. The advantages and disadvantages are too prevalent to be ignored whether or not parents want to instill strong ties to El Salvador.

As we discussed earlier in our introduction, our research confronted a variety of limitations. Many of these limitations were due primarily to our restricted time frame.

The limitations represented within the ten families included in this reports, prohibited us from drawing large scale conclusions about the Salvadoran/ Latino community in Somerville. Despite the specificity of these ten families, they still offered us a varied sample of the different types of family structures that are created or recreated after migration. We were fortunate enough to find among our random sample of Somerville residents, examples of families coming from El Salvador, couples and families formed in the states, informal couples with children, and single parent headed households. Through the women from these different types of families who shared their stories with us, we observed similar shifts in gender roles, family expectations, family values, and more specifically female values. Despite the advantages and disadvantages of each structure and the challenges they have to endure, all ten families create a functional and positive environment specific to their families' needs.

The holes in our research reflect those limitations we have previously acknowledged. If we were to conduct this research project again, we would maintain a focus on the Salvadoran community. It is entirely too large of a project to undertake if we wished to cover the scope of the entire Latino community and its representative nationalities. Instead, our primary goal would be to give ourselves more time to interview a greater number of Somerville Salvadoran residents. Particularly, we would explore more perspectives from the male point of view, from residents beyond the Mystic View Housing Development, and from immigrants who arrived in more varying time periods over the last 25 years. Also, we would like to explore the perspectives of Salvadoran immigrants of differing social classes both before emigrating and once established in the United States. Perspectives from different socio-economic backgrounds would yield

different results because they would not necessarily be from the Mystic View community, they would not have had the same difficulties migrating and settling here, they would not have the dual strain of supporting one's family and adapting to a foreign cultural environment.

We feel that all these possible improvements to our project could be enhanced through future research with more time to explore a wider range of the population. Given our limitations, we are confident with the validity of our representation of the lives of these ten Salvadoran narrators. We have enjoyed the process of investigative research and recording oral history, particularly because of the positive recognition it will give to this community. We would like here to express our gratitude once gain to all those members of the Somerville and Tufts community who participated, assisted, and guided our research over the course of the last three months.

List of Narrators

Name	Interview Date	Location
Alma	October 11, 2003	Her home in Mystic View
	October 29, 2003	Her home in Mystic View
Ana Cecilia	October 19, 2003	Her home near Mystic View
Ana Hilsia	October 25, 2003	Her home in Mystic View
Emma	October 4, 2003	Her home in Mystic View
Ester	November 10, 2003	The Welcome Project at Mystic View
Luis	October 16, 2003	Tufts University
Marcos	October 31, 2003	C.O.R.E.S. Office
Roberto	October 11, 2003	His home in Mystic View
Rosa	October 5, 2003	Her home in Mystic View

Transcription 1

Narrator: Ana Cecilia, 10/19/03

Interviewers: Cecilia Dos Santos and Lexie McGovern

C: This is Cecilia Dos Santos and Lexie McGovern interviewing Ana Cecilia at her home in Somerville on October 19, 2003.

L: ¿En que año nació?

A: En 1962.

L: uhhh... ¿Dónde nació?

A: ¿En que parte de El Salvador?

L: Sí, sí

A: En un departamento de se llama Usulután.

L: Uusssllatan?

A: UUUUsulután

L: ¿Y donde está en el país?

A: En la parte oriente, oriente sí.

C: ¿Es una ciudad grande o un pueblo?

A: Es... es un departamento, un departamento, pero no es tan grande.

AG (Grandmother in the background): No grandote, pero no como San Miguel, pero si es grande

A: Pero sí es grande, o sea no es grande.

L: ¿Y cuando estaba en El Salvador, estaba en la misma parte o diferentes partes?

A: No, yo nací en ese lugar, pero ummm eh mi mamá se vino para la capital cuando yo estaba... como desde tres o cuatro meses, no se yo crecí en la capital de San Salvador

C: ¿Y estuviste en la capital...?

A: Sí, todo el tiempo hasta que me vine?

L: ¿Es una ciudad muy grande?

A: Sí, sí.

L: ¿Y cuando [vino] a los EEUU.?

A: ¿En que año vine a los EEUU?

L: Sí.

A: En el... 1983

C: Y viniste sola?

A: Sí

L: ¿Y su esposo vino...?

A: Yo lo conocí aquí a él.

L: Ohh, ok, sí.

A: Sí, sí.

C: ¿Entonces cuáles fueron las razones porque decidiste salir de El Salvador?

A: Me vine por... por digamos... falta de trabajo... yo recién había salido de lo que se llama aquí high school. Y este... no había mucha fuente de trabajo. Entonces se me presentó la oportunidad de... de una persona para venir para acá, y entonces dije bueno sí voy. Para ver que podría encontrar acá, si podía trabajar.

L: ¿Y [fue] después de que tú terminaste la escuela?

A: No justamente después, yo me quede... dos años.

L: ¿Dos años?

A: Dos años allá después de que salí de la escuela. Este...empecé a estudiar [en] la universidad pero luego me salí también...y...no, no encontré trabajo realmente.

L: Cuando estaba en El Salvador trabajaba solamente en la casa? Y no afuera?

A: No, yo no...trabaje un tiempo en una...como un par de meses nada más en una sala de ventas que...de pan. Trabaje pero no fue mucho tiempo. Luego, en la casa, en la casa tenia una panería, y sí trabajaba allí mientras.

C: ¿Y puedes describir como era la vida de tu familia en El Salvador antes de venir?...

¿Tus padres trabajaban? ¿Tenía hermanos?

A: Um, Pues...sí yo me crecí, yo me crecí con una tía, de verdad, prácticamente, y mi mama, si tengo tres, tres hermanos mas, somos cuarto, y este no, no crecí con mis hermanos prácticamente. Este...yo viví con esta tía, eh...fui a la escuela, y viví todo mi tiempo con ella, todo tiempo con ella. Pero sí, no, no, compartí mucho con mis hermanos.

C: ¿Y tus hermanos trabajaban?

A: No, pues en este tiempo no porque todos estaban en la escuela. Todos estaban estudiando. Tenía uno, bueno en el tiempo que me vine para acá, sí tenía, mi hermano mayor, que sí trabajaba y los otros estaban en la escuela, son menores.

C: ¿Y como se mantenía la familia?

A: Mi mama ha trabajado, *siempre*. Sí mama es la que ha (visto?) por la, por la familia.

L: ¿En que tipo de trabajo?

A: Eh, mi mama trabajaba en una panería. Sí, y este, ella mantuvo la familia todo el tiempo, mis hermanos...solamente ella.

L: ¿Porque vino a Somerville? ¿Tiene familia, conocidos, alguien?

A: No yo llegue aquí a Boston, pues no se, la persona que venía para acá venía para Boston. Entonces yo me vine con ella. Y cuando yo llegue aquí viví un tiempo en esta ciudad, Watertown, donde ella vivía. Luego...pues como al año y algo así porque conocí a mi esposo, entonces nos vinimos a vivir para Somerville.

C: ¿Y esa chica era una amiga o familiar?

A: No, era una amiga.

C: ¿Y, [ella] ya estaba en Boston?

A: Ella había vivido aquí antes en Boston, y había ido a El Salvador a pasear. Entonces, ella fue, me acuerdo que fue a El Salvador a conseguir su, su visa, la verdad se la negaron. Entonces se tuvo que venir ilegalmente. Entonces yo me voy con ella.

C: ¿Y cuanto duro este viaje?

A: El viaje, ocho días...Ya estoy hablando de hace veinte años.

C: ¿Entonces puede describir mas sobre su experiencia a penas llego a Boston?

A: Cuando yo llegue a Boston, creo que a las dos semanas comencé a trabajar. Yo no hablaba Ingles. Eh, la persona donde yo llegue a vivir me consiguió un trabajo en una casa, con una señora. Eran...una pareja, ya señoras mayores. Entonces yo les cuidaba la casa, se las limpiaba, y ese era mi trabajo. Yo vivía en la casa, entonces yo salía nada más el viernes, en las noches, y regresaba el domingo a trabajar en la noche. Y así pase como un año, trabajando de esa manera. Este...los primeros días, las primeras semanas, a mí me llevaban. Me iban a dejar al trabajo y me iban a traer. Después me tocó a mi sola. Verdad, ver como me iba para mi trabajo... y allí fue duro para mi porque no lo conocía nada, no hablaba Ingles, un país completamente desconocido, y allí sí tuve muchas experiencias, me perdí muchas veces, no [sabía] como preguntar, y si sufrí en

ese, en ese aspecto sufrí bastante. Pero, así fui aprendiendo también. No, entonces, tu entiendes, fui conociendo, y ya se me fue mas fácil. Comencé clases, tomar clases de Ingles, y...y las deje por razones de trabajo también. Con dos años, [Roberto – her son] diría yo, ya había nacido él cuando comencé otra vez clases de ingles.

C: ¿Cuanto tiempo trabajo con esa familia?

A: Un año.

C: ¿Y después?

A: Después trabaje, como part-time, que le llaman, en las noches por otro...como unos meses también, uno dos o tres meses. Después conocí a una muchacha que limpiaba casas, ella de Chile por cierto. Y entonces, ella me contrato para limpiar casas con ella. Y allí trabaje...yo trabaje como...un ano con ella también, mas o menos. Pero entonces, yo ya no vivía con esta amiga, yo me había salido de allí, y estaba ya con mi esposo. Y trabaje como un año, antes de que él [Roberto] naciera, y ya cuando él nació, ya...deje ese trabajo. Y, y luego, trabaje - a porque yo tuve un accidente de carro cuando estaba embarazada de, allí fue que yo termine de ese trabajo.

C: ¿Y no trabajo desde que tuvo a su hijo?

A: Hasta cuando tuvo ocho meses, entonces comencé a trabajar otra vez. Pero, para ese entonces, me...este, mi mama se vino conmigo. Se vino cuando él tenía como seis meses, entonces ya yo mi fui a trabajar. Empecé a buscar trabajo, y empecé a trabajar como babysitter, cuidando dos niños, uno de dos años y un bebe de tres meses.

C: ¿Y los cuidaba en su casa?

A: No, no yo iba a la casa de ellos en Newton. Los iba a cuidar y así trabaje como babysitter muchos anos.

C: ¿Y tu mama se quedó en casa con su hijo?

A: Sí.

L: ¿Y su mama trabajaba o no?

A: No.

L: ¿Solamente cuidaba a su hijo?

A: Sí, pero cuidándolo a él nada más. Sí.

C: ¿Y su esposo cuando se conocieron, se casaron, se mudaron a Somerville?

A: Sí.

C: ¿Y el trabajaba?

A: Sí en una factoría.

L: De que era?

A: Sí, era de...de líquidos de limpieza. Sí...en esa factoría, sí preparaba.

C: ¿Y siempre trabajó allí?

A: El trabajó muchos años allí. Trabajó como...no ni tanto...pero como cinco años que trabajó allí.

L: ¿Y su esposo es de El Salvador?

A: Sí.

L: ¿Y como conoció [a su esposo]?

A: Lo conocí en una...era como un día de campo que le llaman verdad, de, de soccer. Ya era como un picnic. Sí, sí porque fuimos que la familia que yo estaba viviendo, fuimos a ese picnic y [allí] lo conocí.

L: ¿Estos picnics son una buena manera para conocer a todos en la comunidad?

A: Sí, exacto. Se da cuenta...real – yo a veces, yo, bueno en ese entonces no sabía que tanta comunidad hispana había aquí en EEUU. En ese tiempo, no había mucho. Y el área en donde yo vivía no se veía gente hispana. Y allí me di cuenta que había *mucha* gente, en este país sí.

L: ¿Sus amigas [de la] misma manera conocieron a sus esposas también?

A: Um hum, sí, sí la mayoría.

C: ¿Entonces cuando llegaste, dijiste que no se veía la comunidad latina?

A: Pues así no, bueno al menos en la área esa donde yo vivía en Watertown, no. Se parece que en otras ciudades sí había como en el área de Jamaica Plain, sí había hispanos. Pero no en Watertown, ni aquí tampoco cuando nosotros llegamos a vivir aquí, eran bien raro los hispanos.

L: ¿Es muy común que mucha gente [venga] a los EEUU soltero? ¿O con un esposo?

A: No, soltero. Sí.

C: ¿Como cree que eh.. usted ha visto cambiar la comunidad latina desde que llego? ¿Hay mas ayuda?

A: ¿Ayuda de los latinos? ¿Como?

C: ¿La comunidad latina usted cree que ha crecido?

A: Sí, bastante, definitivamente. Tres veces quizás mas. Sí, hay mucha mucha gente latina ahora.

C: ¿Y se ve la ayuda entre latinos?

A: ¿Ayuda entre latinos? No se, tal vez en otras comunidades, pero yo creo que en la comunidad salvadoreña no, no existe mucho eso. No, yo encuentro que entre los salvadoreños hay bastante, como...egoísmo entre ellos como que no les gusta ayudarse unos con otros. Yo pienso que no hay mucho, no hay unidad con los salvadoreños. No, en otras nacionalidades sí. Hay muchas que sí son bastantes unidas y se ayudan. Pero, entre los salvadoreños creo que no.

L: Entonces, ¿como encontró ayuda cuando vino primero? ¿Ayuda como servicios sociales?

A: Oh, yo no me di cuenta de servicios así si no hasta, yo diera que hace unos...diez años o menos quizás, no, no unos ochos años. Eh, yo se que existen muchas ayudas, yo, yo tengo veinte años viviendo acá. Pero yo hasta que, que yo comencé a trabajar...en una oficina hispana, oh justamente con los que ustedes trabajan, allí me di cuenta que sí habían bastante ayudas. Pero anteriormente, y mucha gente a lo mejor sí lo sabía, pero yo no me daba cuenta, o sea que no es algo como que hay mucha gente que le dice a uno, “mira, mira aquí que hay ayuda en esto o ve acá”. No, y es así que uno se va dando cuenta, y tal vez por casualidad o lo que sea.

C: ¿Como cree que la vida, la estructura familia, cambia entre los salvadoreños en los EEUU, y la estructura de la familia en El Salvador?

A: No le entiendo muy bien esa pregunta.

L: Por ejemplo, muchas veces en El Salvador, vive con la familia grande...y en los EEUU mucha gente no tiene eso y hay un cambio cuando viene aquí.

A: Es lo mismo, es lo mismo, porque yo, este, se de muchas familias que viven acá pero sí [siguen] siempre igual. Los hermanos, los tíos, y todos en...Yo pienso que tiene que ver mucho acá por el...el costo de la renta, no? Que es muy alto, entonces tienes que vivir con la mayoría juntos. Pero pienso que, no...en cuanto a eso eh, lo traen ellos igual

o sea, allá vivían así, todos en la misma casa. Entonces en llegar aquí, ellos continúan igual, siempre o sea, no, eso pienso que no cambia.

C: ¿Y a cerca de la posición de la mujer en la familia y en la casa, cambia?

A: Cambia! Cambia totalmente porque aquí hay que trabajar. O sea, tiene que hacerlo – allá igual la mujer trabaja pero, pero pasa mas tiempo en la casa. Verdad, allá es, la mujer es la que se encarga de todo completamente. Y aquí creo que en ciertas familias eso cambia. Verdad, no en todas así igual pero si en muchas cambia por la misma razón de que la mujer tiene que ir a trabajar igual. No se puede quedar en la casa con los niños ni nada de eso. Y aunque hayan familiares porque igual los familiares tienen que ir a trabajar. En cambio haya no, los familiares están en la casa y los niños se quedan, y no hay ningún problema con eso. Pero aquí no, aquí todos tienen que salir a trabajar entonces, si en eso sí, yo creo que cambia.

L: ¿Cree que este cambio en su papel como mujer, es un cambio muy difícil para los hombres...? Para aceptar?

A: Eh, tal vez el hombre que viene...que ha vivido, ha tenido su hogar, verdad, en El Salvador por muchos años y vienen acá, es posible que sí. Sí, sí, les cuesta aceptar ese cambio de vida. Y muchos no los aceptan. Pero, cuando sea una que empieza su hogar acá, o sea, es más fácil.

L: ¿Como usted?

A: Exacto porque nosotros no tuvimos hogar allá, cada quien vivía su vida. Llegamos acá es diferente. O sea, aquí hemos formado el hogar, entonces cuando es así es mas fácil. Pero si vienen desde allá, sí, completamente, si eso interfiere mucho en la relaciones.

C: ¿Cree mucha tensión?

A: Sí, sí porque desde luego la mujer no va a poder atender igual al esposo no estando acá que como estaba allá. Es completamente diferente, y creo que eso si crea tensión.

C: ¿Y como cree que ese cambio afecta la mentalidad o la manera en que la mujer se ve a si misma?

A: Yo pienso que la mujer se siente mas...como...realizada. Pienso...porque sí, porque tiene también ese mismo derecho, de poder trabajar, y poder ayudar así igual que lo hace el hombre. Entonces allá no, uno tiene que como...digo como...aguantar, quizás. Es verdad, aceptar todo lo...de la otra parte.

C: ¿Y a causa de esa tensión, usted cree que se ven muchas separaciones, divorcios entre familias que vienen casadas de El Salvador?

A: Um...sí. Sí, yo pienso que sí.

L: ¿Y cree que es un efecto del papel de la mujer que cambia?

A: Exacto porque es muy difícil para ellos aceptar el cambio en uno.

C: ¿Y en esas familias donde existe la separación o el divorcio, cree que la mujer sale adelante estando sola?

A: Sí, sí, porque...es que hay muchas ayudas acá, que uno puede buscar, por eso.

L: ¿Cree que los servicios de mujeres son mejores en los EEUU o en El Salvador? Que diferencias hay?

A: ¿Servicios para las mujeres...?

L: Sí, como cuando solas con familia, con hijos.

A: Sí, en El Salvador no hay ayuda.

L: ¿Pero hay ayuda de la familia [grande]?

A: En la familia, sí, por ejemplo sí, tiene uno más quien, hay alguien con uno. Hay mas facilidad, aquí no lo tienen. Aquí uno se encuentra solo. Pero en cuanto a ayuda digamos del gobierno...hay mucha mas ayuda aquí, bastante. Exacto, allá no.

C: ¿Usted cree que esa ayuda del estado o del gobierno, ayuda a que la mujer quiera ser independiente?

A: Sí, definitivamente. Yo pienso que eso tiene que ver también en que en El Salvador la mujer siempre se queda callada y todo porque no tiene de donde...sabe que si se queda sola va a aguantar bastante, va a pasar muchos problemas económicos. Mientras que aquí no. Aquí encuentra muchas ayudas.

L: ¿Como mantiene conexión con su familia en El Salvador?

A: ¿Como nos comunicamos? Por teléfono. Umm...con correspondencia.

C: ¿Y toda su familia menos su madre esta todavía allí?

A: No, yo tengo un hermano, un hermano y sobrinas. En El Salvador tengo mis tíos.

C: ¿Y tus otros hermanos?

A: Tengo un hermano en Canadá. Y mi hermano mayor hace casi dos años que murió. Y me quedan mis sobrinas en El Salvador. Y un hermano menor que esta en El Salvador con su familia.

C: ¿Y después de estar acá hace veinte años y de crear su familia acá, como ve la situacion de las familias en El Salvador? ¿Quisiera volver?

A: No, no me gustaría volver. No porque es...nosotros acá bueno, mis hijos pues han crecido en un ambiente completamente diferente. Y yo me acostumbre también al ambiente de acá. Yo he ido a El Salvador, yo he visitado... por un mes, por dos semanas, por tres semanas, pero eso es suficiente. Yo no me podría quedar viviendo allá al *menos* que yo...podría montar un negocio o llegar con dinero tal vez. Pero, en las condiciones que estamos nosotros acá, ahorita no. No esta en mis planes.

C: ¿Usted ve que hay cambios en las esperanzas para el futuro entre las familias de El Salvador y de las familias en EEUU? ¿Y para sus hijos cree que eso cambia también?

A: Aquí tengo más posibilidades y ellos tienen más posibilidades también de lograr lo que ellos quisieran hacer. Mientras que en El Salvador si yo hubiera tenido familia en El Salvador, creo que hubiera sido con muchas mas limitaciones. Y...no se si hubiera llegado a lograr lo que quisiera con ellos porque es muy difícil la vida en El Salvador, es bien difícil. No, definitivamente aquí yo pienso que si no, si no salen adelante, si no logran ser alguien, es porque realmente no quieren, tal vez. No porque no puedan porque aquí si hay la oportunidad de poder salir adelante.

C: Ahora esta trabajando otra vez, ¿no? ¿A donde trabaja?

A: Después de que yo, yo trabaje...este...yo trabaje de babysitter desde el '86...desde el '86 hasta el ... '97, '97 algo así, no '96 porque después en el '96 entre a estudiar. Y entonces en '97 conseguí un trabajo allí en Concilio Hispano y trabaje por 4 años en Concilio Hispano. Y luego de Concilio Hispano ahora estoy trabajando aquí en el Somerville Mental Health. Yo tengo 3 años trabajando allí.

C: ¿Y le gustaría seguir estudiando?

A: Sí, sí yo estoy estudiando. Tomo clases, estoy ahorita tomando, ahorita en ese instante no lo estoy haciendo, no estoy tomando clases de esto, pero si tengo que comenzar curso de Child Development y he tomado tres cursos ya de eso. Todavía no he terminado.

C: ¿Y le gustaría trabajar para la comunidad hispana en Somerville?

A: Lo que yo trabaje en Concilio, trabaje con la comunidad hispana. Entonces fue Cambridge y Somerville. Y sí es muy bonito, y justamente hoy en mi trabajo lo que hago yo es este, Home-visitor, y trabajo solo con familias hispanas, ayudándoles.

C: ¿Y Usted cree que es importante?

A: Sí, sí porque con muchas de las familias que yo trabajo...tienen ya años de estar acá y ellos no tienen idea de todo lo que pueden conseguir acá de todas las ayudas que hay. Y eso es mi trabajo, educar a las familias, verdad, para que ellos puedan salir adelante ellos solos. Y yo pienso que eso es un trabajo muy importante...porque eso me hubiera ayudado mucho a mí antes si yo hubiera sabido de esto.

C: ¿Quizás es la manera de devolverle algo a la comunidad?

A: Sí, quizás por eso sí me gusta, y me siento muy contenta de eso, de poderlos ayudar. Yo no tuve esa oportunidad, y se por todo lo que pase y entonces yo entiendo todas estas familias lo que ellos están pasando. Quizás por eso me gusta mucho.

C: ¿Y le gustaría ver más unidad en la comunidad?

A: Por supuesto, sí. Eso sería lo mejor, que fuéramos mas unidos. Es que cada persona o sea, es como...piensa, todo mundo piensa diferente. Y, y es difícil llegar a acuerdos.

C: ¿Quisiera contarnos más sobre su familia?

A: Bueno podría contarles de mi familia que tengo tres hijos. Tengo veinte años de vivir en este país. Estoy casado por 18 años. Y tengo...tres hijos varones de 17, 13, y casi 5 años. Mi mama llegó a vivir con nosotros cuando mi hijo mayor tenía 6 meses. Y ella cuidaba a mis hijos, gracias a eso yo he podido trabajar por un tiempo, no? Porque si no, no se como hubiera hecho. Porque ella se fue por un tiempo, se fue como por 2 años, y tuvo que nada mas trabajar medio tiempo, porque los tenía en la escuela. Trabajaba en la mañana y al medio día ya salía a recogerlos para estar con ellos en el tarde. Es bien difícil o sea que gracias a eso que ella estaba con nosotros siempre para poder trabajar, y he podido estudiar, y lograr salir un poquito adelante. Y... ¿que más?

C: ¿Usted ayudó a algún otro familiar a venir de El Salvador?

A: Este, sí mi hermano que vive en Canadá. Sí este...lo ayude eso fue en el '87 que el se vino. Hace ya cuatro años que yo había llegado este logre que el se viniera. El vivió con nosotros como un año, yo creo, como un año y medio. Luego logró a entrar a Canadá, y ahora él vive allí. El es ciudadano de Canadá.

L: ¿Porque decidió a entrar a Canadá?

A: Porque él buscó trabajo acá, le costó encontrar mucho trabajo. Le costó mucho digo buscar trabajo y encontró trabajo pero realmente no, no le pagaba bien, y luego le dieron lay off, entonces estaba aquí sin hacer nada, y como que se sintió mal. Y se dio cuenta que había un programa para los salvadoreños, que los estaban aceptando en Canadá, que le daban amnistía. Entonces, él logró irse y se fue. Le dieron entrada a Canadá y logro obtener sus papeles legales en Toronto.

C&L: Bueno, muchas gracias por la entrevista.

A: El gusto es mío, espero que les haya ayudado.

Transcription 2

Narrator: Alma, 10/29/03

Interviewers: Cecilia Dos Santos and Lexie McGovern

L: This is Lexie McGovern and Cecilia Dos Santos interviewing Alma on October 29, 2003 at Alma's home.

L: Entonces, cuando estaba en El Salvador en su casa cuales eran sus responsabilidades en la casa.

A: En mi casa era todo, todas las responsabilidades desde que era pequeña desde los nueve años empezaba a ayudar a mi mamá a lavar la ropa, que cocinar, que planchar, que a todo.

L: ¿En El Salvador trabajaba afuera de la casa?

A: No, no solamente [de lo] mi mamá.

L: ¿Entonces cuando llegó aquí la transición de trabajar afuera de la casa era muy difícil?

A: ¿Aquí en EEUU?

L: Sí, sí.

C: El cambio de trabajar a dentro de la casa a tener que trabajar afuera. Como...

A: Bueno, aquí se hace las dos cosas. Aquí en este país yo creo es más, más duro porque se hace más cosas. Hay que salir a trabajar afuera, hay que cuidar los niños, y hay que atender la casa. Son más, más trabajos...mmm hum.

C: ¿Como describiría la diferencia o como se sintió poder salir afuera de la casa a trabajar? ¿Poder tener un trabajo que no sea solamente doméstico?

A: ¿Aquí?

C: Sí.

A: Bueno, de todas maneras tenemos que hacerlo porque es una, como una responsabilidad cuando ya tenemos familia. Hay que...eh...tenemos que salir a...afuera a buscar trabajo, y como se lo repito, es más la responsabilidad que tenemos porque hay que mantener la casa, y los hijos, y todo...mmm hum.

L: Umm, ok. ¿Tu amiga o tu amigo, que ayudó a Usted a venir aquí, era una mujer?

A: Un hombre.

L: ¿Un hombre?

A: Mmm hum.

L: Un hombre de su...

C: ¿...pueblo?

A: Sí de mi mismo lugar.

C: ¿Y cuando le ayudó a encontrar un apartamento?

A: Sí, yo...el ya tenía unos amigos con quien él vivía. Y fuimos a vivir allí a su apartamento de sus amigos. Allí él me tenía un cuarto, y ropa, y ya me tenía todo listo [ya tenía un] trabajo...mmm hum.

C: ¿Pero allí vivía solamente 2 hombres y Usted?

A: No, habían más, en una casa grande, y eran como 8 personas allí en ese apartamento.

C: ¿Eran familias, mujeres?

A: Sí, sí familias.

C: ¿Y como, como trabajaba la comunidad a dentro de esa casa? ¿Quiénes...todos trabajaban?

A: Todos trabajaban...todos independientemente. Tenían su hogar, y tenían que trabajar.

L: ¿Habían niños?

A: Sí, dos niños.

C: ¿Y de las parejas que estaban en esa casa Usted notaban si las mujeres o las esposas trabajaban o se quedaban con los niños?

A: trabajaban.

L: ¿Y esa parejas se casaron en El Salvador o aquí?

A: Aquí.

[Group laughter as cat jumps from window to Cecilia's lap and startles her.]

A: Kitty! ¡Ella estaba en la ventana!

L: Se casaron aquí en EEUU?

A: Sí, mmm hum.

C: ¿Conoce o conocía en ese tiempo familias que se habían casado en El Salvador y vinieron aquí?

A: No.

C: Ok.

C: Después de que nació su primer hijo, también después del segundo, ¿quien le ayudo con, con cuidar los chicos o con, con mantenerse mientras trabajaba? ¿O como era que hizo eso?

A: Muy pesado, me tocaba que salir a dejarlos, a mi hijo a donde lo cuidaban. Yo vivía aquí en Somerville y...lo tenía que llevar a Malden que luego a Everett y así anduve en varios lugares.

C: ¿Y eran con conocidos o familiares?

A: Sí, a, a...conocidos nada mas.

L: Y, how do you say did she take time off from work [after her sons were born]?

C: ¿Dejó de trabajar por un tiempo después de que nacieron?

A: Nació...alrededor de un mes, nada mes.

C: ¿Y en ese mes, como hizo para mantenerse?

A: Estaba con el papa de el en esos días. Sí, y el me ayudaba. Pero luego después de eso nos separamos.

C: ¿Y después de su primer hijo [se separaron]?

A: Sí, mmm hum. Pero nos seguimos frecuentando y nació Alexander [segundo hijo].

Ya, pero después terminamos definitivamente.

C: Y el papa de los chicos ayudo con mantenerlos.

A: No, nunca, nunca ha ayudado.

C: ¿Y entonces solamente...?

A: Solamente yo, yo soy la mama y la papa.

C: ¿Y como se siente tener esa responsabilidad?

A: Ahh...me siento bien. Muy bien porque lo he sabido hacerlo hasta ahora [can't understand], y me siento bien [Alma laughs].

C: ¿Y como cree que esa cierta independencia es diferente que como viven las mujeres solteras en El Salvador? ¿Entiende la pregunta?

A: No.

C: ¿Cree que es mas fácil ser madre, mujer soltera criando sus hijos aquí en EEUU que en El Salvador? ¿O como ve las diferencias?

A: Aquí porque hay que trabajar. Y tenemos en el lugar donde vivimos, tenemos la responsabilidad de pagar, que billes, que la renta, y todo que en el país de nosotros no

haces. Entonces yo creo que aquí es más difícil. Pero hay que hacerlo, hay que hacerlo como sea.

C: ¿Y cuales...que cree Usted que son los beneficios de hacerlo y [porque no volverse a EL Salvador]?

A: ¿Aquí? Yo creo que como ellos nacieron acá, nacieron, se criaron aquí, se fueron creciendo y...la cultura de aquí, la lengua de aquí, todo más [fácil]...yo con mi trabajo los he podido sacar adelante. Y en mi país, es muy difícil para mi y para ellos...no hay trabajo, en primer lugar, y ellos son...son de aquí. ¿Entiende? Por eso yo me siento mejor acá... [laughs] yeah.

L: ¿Sus metas de Usted y de sus niños cambiaron cuando vino aquí? [Alma appeared as though not to understand the question]

C: ¿Lo que quisiera para su familia y sus hijos? ¿Cree que esto cambia con estar aquí?

A: ¿Para mis hijos? Mmmm...no comprendo mucho la pregunta.

L: Cuando estaba en El Salvador, tus niños futuros...umm.

C: Lo que se imaginaba para...

A: Ahh...por la familia que estaba allá, no como yo no tenia familia pero no me esperaba tenerlos acá tampoco [laughs].

C: ¡Oh no, no!

L: Los niños que no son vivos que son imaginados...

A: Uh huh... [group laughter].

L: ¿Cuando era niña uhh...tenía una idea de sus niños en el futuro?

C: ¿De su familia y de que quisiera para sus hijos, de que oportunidades le quisiera dar?

A: Ahh, pues yo quisiera darles lo mejor. Lo mejor para ellos, que estudian, y que trabajen, y que sean hombres trabajadores.

L: ¿Y sí [hubiera] criado los niños en El Salvador, estas metas serian diferentes?

A: Sí, se fueran abajo todas las ideas. Sí, por el trabajo, la economía, la pobreza más que todo. Y aquí se trabaja, se cansa uno, pero se logra de [esas cosas] que uno quiere. Y en el país de uno aun que trabaje no se puede. Mmm..hum. [Birds chirp loudly, group laughs, tape paused, restarted].

C: Usted nos contó [en la primera entrevista] que fue la primera de su familia de venir a EEUU.

A: Sí.

C: ¿Como su familia, y sus hermanos, como vieron eso siendo mujer?

A: Les dio mas ideas y deseos de venir ellos también para acá. De ver que vine siendo mujer me atreví a llegar acá. Después todos quisieran venir. Y ya casi todos están jaca...mmm hum.

C: Pero, en el momento que tomo la decisión, los hombres de su familia no tuvieran ninguna...

A: ¿Inconveniente? Mi papa. No quería que yo viniera acá. Porque como dicen que en el camino, que le pasan muchas cosas a uno, corre peligro, puede correr hasta la muerte uno allí...y el no quería que viniera para acá...mmm hum, pero aquí estoy. [laughs]

L: ¿Y sus hermanos tuvieron alguna emoción sobre...?

C: ¿Tenían alguna preocupación en que viniera sola?

A: No, yo creo que no. Se despidieron y todo tranquilo. A los quince días ya estaba acá.

C: ¿Y no sabe Usted si su papa hubiera gustado mas que uno de sus hermanos venga primero?

A: Mmm hum, pero que nadie tenia la oportunidad de llegar acá. Yo por lo menos encontré alguien que me daba la llegada, me prestaba dinero...uh huh...entonces ellos no lo tenían. Si, tenía que ser yo automáticamente ser la primera...mmm hum.

L: El conocido que le ayudaba a Usted a venir aquí, ¿este conocido es amigo de sus hermanos?

A: No.

L: Y es un conocido de de...

A: ...de la familia.

C: A cerca de las familias salvadoreñas que están aquí en Somerville o acá alrededor que conoce, ¿Usted ve que...como ve las relaciones entre los hombres y las mujeres aquí?

¿O entre parejas que llegaron desde El Salvador? ¿O las que se formaron aquí?

A: Bueno aquí yo he visto las parejas que si duran por un tiempo y, y...luego se terminan. No se porque.

C: ¿Son parejas que vienen de El Salvador juntas?

A: Si, o a veces se junta aquí y no duran...poco tiempo están juntos. Como es un país mas libre, y...que se yo pero [can't understand] un lado y los hijos por otro lado. Es más liberal.

C: ¿Y como cree que eso afecta a las mujeres en su pensamiento? ¿Y en como se ven?

A: Algunas las puedes afectar, a mi no me ha afectado el nada. Yo soy la mujer más feliz del mundo, de la tierra, de todo el planeta. Yo me quede con mis hijos solo y los y hasta hora. Y estoy sola y soy feliz así. Pero algunas personas no lo hacen tal vez porque tienen miedo de no sacar sus hijos adelante, que creen que si no están con el papa de sus hijos se van a morir. Falta de valor. Eso es falta de valor, y decisión. Mmm hum, y nadie se muere, nadie se muere estando solo. ¿No? [laughs]

C: ¿Y Usted cree que esta separaciones vienen a causa de mujeres que se sienten mas liberal?

A: Y los hombres, porque los hombres de mayoría son mas machistas. Sí...mmm hum.

L: ¿Y en El Salvador, cree que la única razón porque no hay muchas separaciones es porque el país no es liberal o...?

A: Allá yo creo que porque el hombre trabaja y la mujer se queda en casa nada más. Y entonces el hombre trabaja y tiene que llevar la comida a la casa y la mujer esta cocinando y limpiando la casa, cuidando los hijos, y aquí no. Aquí cada quien tiene que salir por las mañanas, o por las noches a trabajar y cuidar...y uno después tiene doble trabajo.

Atender el marido, la casa, los hijos, todo...no, mucho trabajo. Es demasiado trabajo.

[laughs]

C: ¿Pero Usted cree que vale la pena todo ese trabajo?

A: ¡Claro! [laughs] Sí, yo no estuve casada, pero estuve acompañada pero vivir así, es vivir mas pesado. No tiene tiempo uno ni para respirar. ¡Sale del trabajo a coger su hijo, llega a casa, cansado, y a veces el papa de los hijos esta en casa mirando televisión, la casa desorganizada, no hay que comer, y uno llega a cocinar, a recoger la casa, y a darle de comer al marido también! ¡Eso no es correcto! ¡Eso no esta bien! ¡Esos son hombres machistas! Mmm...hum [laughs].

L: Y también cuidan los pájaros y el gato. [Lexie attempts to make joke in Spanish – group laughter]

A: ¡Es mas trabajo todavía! [laughs]

C: ¿Usted cree que las mujeres solteras en El Salvador o las madres solteras en El Salvador tienen la tendencia de depender de los padres de sus hijos o de sus esposos o de sus familiares más que aquí?

A: Sí, porque bueno, aquí por ejemplo si la mujer se queda sola y si no tiene trabajo pues aquí le dan ayuda... para que mantenga su hijo. Y en el país de nosotros allá no hay... mmm hum. Es que allá si la mujer se queda sola se muere... mmm hum.

C: ¿Por ayuda Usted [habla] de la familiares o conocidos o del Estado?

A: ¿Aquí? No al Estado. No por la familia a veces no reciben de nada o de amigos no. Del Estado porque el gobierno, el gobierno yo... es muy bueno aquí con las mujeres que están solas, y [could not understand] ayuda salir los niños... mmm hum.

C: ¿Y Usted cree que teniendo esta oportunidad de que le ayude el gobierno a empezar a una mujer que esta sola, con hijos, eso también le da la motivación de vivir independiente de su marido?

A: Sí, claro, claro. [Bird chirps, long pause]

C: Bueno, sí no quiere agregar más sobre las familias... [Alma shakes her head "no"]

C&L: Muchas gracias por la entrevista de nuevo.

A: Espero que sirva. [laughs]

Pictures of the Narrators

Emma



Alma



Rosa



Roberto



Ana Hilsia



Luis



Ana Cecilia



Marcos



Ester

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